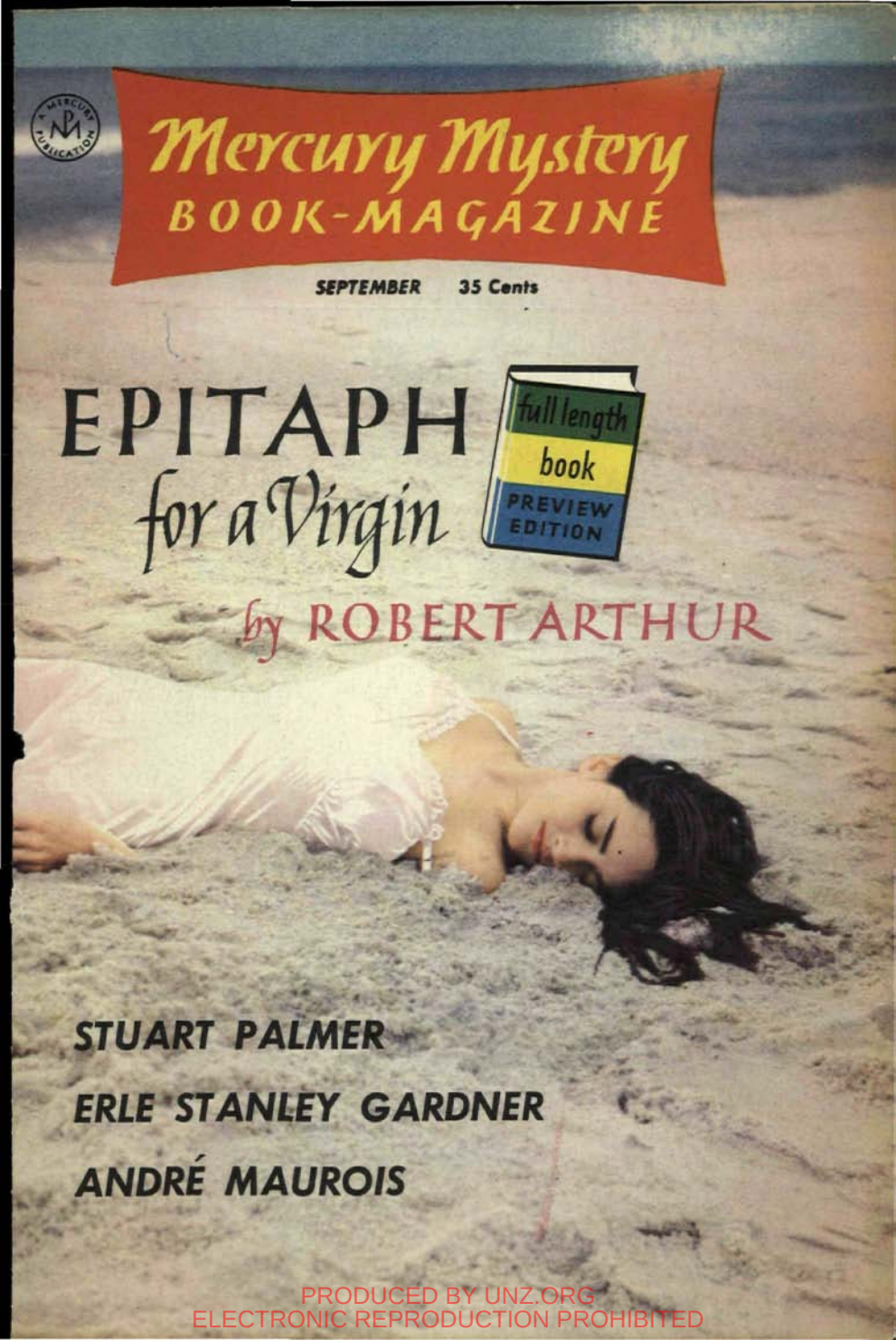
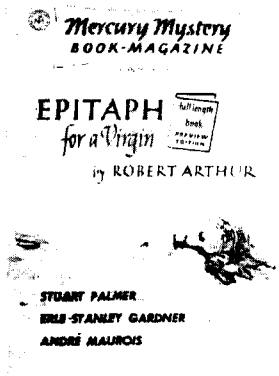


PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In This Issue—EPITAPH FOR A VIRGIN by ROBERT ARTHUR

Max London wasn't looking for trouble when he went to Dunn's gambling casino—but when he left, Dunn was flat on the floor, there was $30,000 in IOU's on the table, and Dunn's girl was standing there with a look in her eye and nothing on from the waist up. Max had no time for her just then. He had stumbled on something that couldn't wait, something that made even the $30,000 small-change. But before he could do anything about it he was up to his ears in murder.



Next Issue—*on newsstands September 20th, will feature a full book-length original novel,* **LIVE AND LET DIE** *by* **ED LACY.** *"For less salary than you're making I'm expected to face guns, knives and fists every day . . ." young cop Dave Wintino said at a party, and he wasn't kidding. He had two tough cases to crack. He had to find a cop-killer, and he was detailed to keep his eye on well-stacked Rose Henderson who was frightened of the men who rough-shadowed her. The second case had its pleasant moments, until the two cases fused unexpectedly one terrifying night.*

Also, sparkling articles, fact-crime stories and offbeat tales of the strange and exotic. **Why not get every exciting issue? Use the convenient coupon on page 104 to subscribe—TODAY!**

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mercury Mystery
BOOK-MAGAZINE

EPITAPH FOR A VIRGIN — *Robert Arthur* — 3

A Complete Mystery Novel

An exciting original novel by the well-known magazine, radio and TV writer; featuring tough ex-pug Max London and two beautiful women: Selma Carle, the model who poses in the nude but is, surprisingly, a virgin, and the voluptuous Meg Philips, who isn't.

Mystery Puzzle: Miami Murder — *J. A. Kripper* — 105

The Knockout Bullet — *Erle Stanley Gardner* — 106

Memo from the Underground — *André Maurois* — 111

Proof Negative — *Paul Steiner* — 114

Once Aboard the Lugger — *Stuart Palmer* — 115

Cover photograph by BILL STONE
(*illustrating* EPITAPH FOR A VIRGIN)

Mercury Mystery Book-Magazine, SEPTEMBER, 1956, Vol. 2, No. 7, Whole No. 220. Published bi-monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Twelve issue subscription $4.00 in U. S. A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. © *1956 by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Printed in U. S. A.*

JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *Editor and Publisher* — ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor*

HOWARD K. PRUYN, *Circulation Manager* — CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Editorial Secretary*

GEORGE SALTER, *Art Director*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

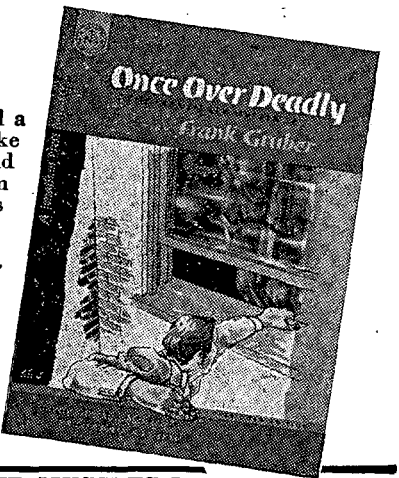
EXCITING MYSTERY READING

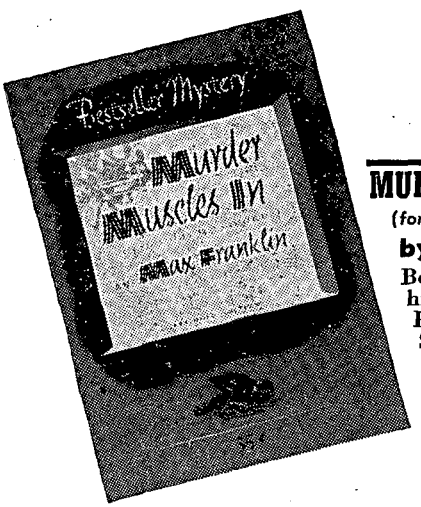
ONCE OVER DEADLY

(formerly "The French Key Mystery")

by Frank Gruber

When Johnny Fletcher and his friend found a corpse in their hotel room — it seemed like carrying a bad joke too far. Then they found a coin on the corpse — a collector's item worth $15,000. And Johnny decided he was going to collect it — if he live long enough. "Lively . . . tricky . . . high-test . . ." reports *The Saturday Review.* **A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY**





MURDER MUSCLES IN

(formerly "Justice Has No Sword")

by Max Franklin

Because Sydney Crane was found dead in his bathtub on a Tuesday, Marianne Parker was sure he had been murdered. She *knew* he bathed only on Saturdays. The police laughed at her when she told them this and only after she was kidnapped did they realize Crane's importance, and that Marianne's life was in the hands of a giant syndicate. "Smashing climax . . . don't miss it." says the San Francisco *Chronicle.*

A BESTSELLER MYSTERY

Top Flight Stories in these Magazines, too

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Here are the best stories of practically all the modern masters, plus the little known mystery masterpieces of world-famous literary figures. Only Ellery Queen, owner of the world's finest library of crime fiction, could bring you such gems every month! 35¢ a copy. $4.00 a year.

The Magazine of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION

Here are outstanding stories, new and old, for people with imagination . . . sparkling tales of strange new worlds and peoples. F&SF is edited by famed author-editor Anthony Boucher. 35¢ a copy. By subscription, $4.00 a year. Published monthly.

Mercury Publications, 527 Madison Avenue, N.Y.

MORE THAN 60 MILLION BOOKS AND MAGAZINES SOLD TO ENTHUSIASTIC READERS

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max London was tough as they come but he wasn't smart enough to stay out of trouble. Of course, when "trouble" came wrapped in a package like Meg Philips, who can blame him? She was sexy and willing . . . and very dangerous, as Max found out too late . . . . About the setting, the author says: "All the people and the places in this book are fictitious, except Hollywood and the State of California, both of which are real, improbable as they may seem."

EPITAPH FOR A VIRGIN

by Robert Arthur

CHAPTER ONE

THE GIRL'S BODY lay just at the edge of the surf. The blue Pacific wavelets came in, nudged it, then hurried back into the ocean.

The girl's hair, long and intensely black, washed forward and back with each wave. Her eyes were shut. Her nude body was a composition of sun-tanned skin, interestingly curved and rounded, half in and half out of the water.

Max London framed the girl in the ground glass of a Rolleiflex. The big man's square, battered features expressed no emotion as he snapped a picture. He wound the film for another exposure.

"Now open your mouth, Selma, sweetheart," he said. Obediently the girl in the water opened her mouth. Max clicked the shutter just as a wave bigger than the rest broke over her face. She scrambled to her feet, coughing and spluttering.

"Darn you!" she choked. "You did that on purpose."

Max snapped another picture as Selma Carle faced him, rivulets of water running down her firmly rounded body, her long black hair plastered to her shoulders. Indignantly she turned and plunged into the ocean again to shoulder depth.

"Bring me my robe!" she ordered, but her anger had subsided. She watched Max London turn and walk up to the white, dry sand above the high-tide mark. Max put the camera into a plastic bag with a draw-string. Then he brought a robe of red and white terrycloth back to the water's edge.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Bring it out to me, Max," the girl in the water asked. London grinned at her and waded out until the water lapped above his navy blue trunks. Selma took the rolled-up robe.

"Now go on back." When he obeyed she followed, holding the robe out of the water until she could slip it on and run after Max.

"How did they come out, Max?" she asked, slipping her arm through his. "Did I look nice?"

"You looked beautiful, Selma," Max told her. "Whether the pictures will be any good depends. I'm no portrait photographer. The bodies I take pictures of are usually a little on the dead side."

He dropped down on the sand beside the camera. Selma, using the beach robe as a dressing tent, slipped into shorts and a halter under it, then threw it off and sat down beside him.

"It's nice here," she said, looking up and down the length of exclusive beach, which had a cliff behind it, and a score of elaborate residences squeezed in between the cliff and the sand. "Is it expensive to live out here?"

"So expensive that if you have to think about it you can't afford it," Max told her, rolling over and nestling his head in his freckled, muscular arms. "Rub my back with suntan lotion, baby, I burn easy."

Selma Carle opened the small brown bottle. Tilting a pool of oil onto his flat, hard back, she began rubbing.

"You're a blond," she remarked. "That's why you burn easy. Now me, I can lie out in the sun all day without burning."

"How is it you don't have any strap marks?" Max asked. Selma giggled.

"Not what you're thinking. I used to have strap marks until a couple of years ago I met a girl who suggested I could do modeling. She said I ought to specialize in sportswear and sheer things and the strap marks might show. She had to sunbathe for her health, so she and I spent a whole summer getting tanned. She burned easy and had to go easy but I tanned all over."

"And you do mean all over," Max said.

"I saw her a couple of weeks ago." Selma applied the oil with firm strokes. "I guess her health is okay because she's put on weight and got a boy friend."

Max stretched with animal pleasure. "Keep it up. You don't know what this does to me."

"You don't know what it does to *me*," Selma sighed, rolling her eyes. "Are you Swedish or Irish, Max?"

"Swedish. On my mother's side. My father was English."

"A Swedish private detective." Selma giggled. "It sounds silly."

"Not to a Swede. Anyway, my brother Pete is English. A very refined type who won't kick a man in the stomach after he's down."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How can you be Swedish and your brother be English?"

"It's all in the mind."

Max relaxed. It was pleasant to lie on the sand under the hot California sun.

He was almost asleep when he heard Selma murmur, "Oh, oh!" and stop.

"Oh oh what?" he asked, without looking up.

"Nothing," Selma said. "Nothing Max. Lie still, I missed a spot."

She began to make with the ointment again, so vigorously he sat up.

"Oh, oh!" Max London echoed.

"Damn," Selma scowled.

"So that's what you call nothing." Max stared at the woman who had lain down ten yards up the beach. She lay on her back and two Turkish towels were draped across her body to meet the minimum demands of modesty with the protection of sensitive areas from the sun.

From head to foot she was as blonde as a pitcher of cream. Her hair was ash touched with honey, long and fine. There was no discernible polish on her nails. Her face was finely chiseled, firm and sensitive. Large dark goggles hid her eyes.

"You don't have to stare at her as if you'd never seen a woman before," Selma complained. "What's she got that I haven't got — yes, and that you haven't had a better look at, too!"

"Selma, sweetheart," Max said honestly, "I don't know. Where'd she come from?"

"That next house. Anyway she walked down from the gate so I guess she lives there."

"She hasn't been in California long," Max said. "Or she wouldn't be so reckless with our sun."

"I'm sure she can take care of herself." Selma's tone was cool. "She's not a girl. She's at least twenty-eight."

"Just the same —" Max got to his feet "— she doesn't realize what a wallop our California sun can pack. As one blond to another, it's my duty to warn her."

"Maybe she's a Swede too," Selma sniffed. "Don't forget to write."

Max strolled across the ten yards of hot sand toward the sun-bathing woman. Fifty yards further on a little family of three was walking along the hard-packed sand close to the water. A small boy, barely big enough to toddle, was staggering along with enormous pride, clutching the hand of a brunette in a blue bathing suit. A young brunette. Well-figured and at least fifteen years younger than the tall, thin, stooping man with greying hair who walked beside them, favoring his right leg with a heavy knobbed cane.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max stopped. He had walked almost up to the woman on the sand and she had not stirred. She must have heard him coming across the sand, even if she hadn't seen him. And most people, lying down, will flinch or sit up if a stranger comes walking directly toward them.

"Excuse me," Max London said, "but —"

The woman's lips moved. "This is a private beach," the lips said.

"I know," Max answered solemnly. "But I'm a private detective, so that's all right. What I wanted to say was —"

"I won't sunburn, but thank you for worrying about me, Mr. London," the lips interrupted him.

"Two to nothing, your side," Max growled. "Which one of us is the detective?"

The lips did not answer.

"Look," Max said, "you're from the East. You don't know what a California sun can —"

"Ten minutes today," the lips said. "Five minutes yesterday. Fifteen minutes tomorrow. Five minutes more each day until I tan. Does that reassure you, Mr. London?"

"Well, okay." With a suppressed grin he turned away. "If you want to —"

He broke off. The woman on the sand had turned her head, and he saw what he had not noticed before — the scar that covered her left cheek from the ear to the cheekbone. A fine, reddish network like a spiderweb, the only visible blemish on her body.

"Want to what?" the cool voice inquired.

"Want to exchange what you've got for a second rate tan, it's your business," he finished. "But if you ask me —"

"I haven't," the woman assured him. "I almost never ask a man for advice. But if I ever do, I'll come to you."

Max London opened his mouth and shut it again. The tips of his ears burning, he went with long strides back to Selma.

"No luck?" she asked with lifted brows. "Maybe ladies don't prefer blonds."

"Time to go in now," Max said. "Maybe she won't burn but I will. Help me gather this stuff, sweetheart, and carry it inside."

He picked up the beach blanket and the Rolleiflex. Selma gathered up her robe and the suntan ointment and trotted after him as he strode toward the expensive beach house concealed behind a screen of trees between the sand and the hillside. Vista Beach, or at least this section of it, was probably the most exclusive real estate in California.

They went through the gate in the wrought iron fence and along a flag-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stoned walk up to a modest twelve room bungalow in pale pink and yellow stucco, with modern low lines and a flat roof.

Inside, the floors were polished, the furniture modern but comfortable, and the air cool. Selma went off to the guest wing to shower and dress. Max London used the master suite, and was already dressed and searching the cellarette, converted from a carved Spanish chest 300 years old, when Selma came back.

He brought out a dusty bottle and held it up.

"Brandy," he said lovingly. "The last case of this was imported by Tom Bates' grandfather the year I was born, which was also the year Prohibition blighted the land."

He opened the bottle and looked at Selma. She nodded. He poured two generous dollops into brandy snifters.

Selma sipped daintily. She sat back in a chair of green and yellow webbing, looking very young and pretty. She looked at Max London with uncertainty tinged with reproach.

"Don't you like me, Max?" she asked.

London grinned at her. When he smiled the almost somber quality of his square, battered features lightened and lifted.

"Selma honey —" Max looked solemn — "are you by any chance propositioning me?"

"I'm just wondering," Selma said in a plaintive tone, "why you aren't propositioning *me*. This isn't how I expected to be treated when I took this job."

Max laughed, a snorting laugh that began deep in his chest and came out explosively. "Don't tell me that you've been reading the books Pete writes!"

Selma nodded vigorously. "They're good books," she said. "There's nothing like a good mystery to relax you. And well, naturally after reading them, when the call came into the agency for a model to pose in the — the altogether for you — well, I figured any girl who answered it would be — well. . . ."

"Would be at my mercy?" Max supplied a phrase for her. Selma, looking away and flushing, nodded.

"And you answered the call anyway? Why?" Max asked with curiosity.

"I don't know, Max," Selma sighed. "Something just came over me. I told Marilyn — she takes the calls at the agency — I'd take the job. I guess I figured it would be my last chance."

Max refilled the brandy glass again. "Last chance for what?"

"Last chance to — oh, *you* know!" Selma stirred. "I mean, I'm engaged. Roger is a very nice boy, very good manners and everything. He works in a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

supermarket and he's studying to be a store manager. I love him and all that, but I know Roger won't ever be *rough*. He won't — Oh, I'm just being crazy. Forget it, Max."

Max took out a pack of cigarettes someone had given him for Christmas — personalized, with his name printed on each cigarette in fancy letters, *Max London*.

"Selma, baby," he said, "I'm only rough and mean to people I dislike. Or at least *I* think so. As far as you're concerned I think you're very beautiful. But I hired you to pose for some pictures and when I hire a girl I don't insist on any extra-curricular activities. On a date things might be different."

"Oh, well, now I understand." Selma's young face brightened. "But you could pay me off, then I wouldn't be working for you any more and then —" Selma began, but paused. "All right," she sighed. "Probably I'll be glad after I'm married to Roger."

"I'm positive you will."

"Well, anyway," she giggled, "the other girls will *think*. They read your books too."

"Not my books. Pete's books. I'm no writer."

"But they're about you." She looked at him, wide-eyed. "Max, tell me. Why do you get into so many fights?"

Max shrugged. "Just happens. Maybe I like fighting."

Selma inspected his features critically.

"You were very good-looking once," she pronounced. "You still are, you know, Max, in a rugged way. Except your nose is just a wee bit crooked and your right ear is a little bit swollen and you look — well, like a fellow who's been in a lot of fights."

"You should see the other guys, baby."

"What are the pictures for?" Selma asked, a new thought occurred to her. "I mean, I never expected to have to lie down in the water in the altogether."

"An article Pete is writing. Based on the Starr Faithful murder case. Kind of a fictionization of it. He does a lot of stuff like that. You were posing for the victim."

Selma shuddered delicately.

"What does Pete look like?" Selma asked.

"He looks like me, but more refined — he thinks. After all, we're brothers."

"Do you and your brother Pete live here?" Selma asked, with frank curiosity. "I mean, it's very expensive, isn't it? I always heard only millionaires could live in this part of Vista Beach. The Golden Sands they call it."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm keeping an eye on the house for the owner, Tom Bates," Max London told her. "He hasn't too much confidence in the police force of this town, and neither do I. In fact, I've had a couple of run-in's with Nelson Hugo, the police chief, and Freddie Wharton, the assistant D.A., and they'd like nothing better than to jug me. Pete wrote up Vista Beach in the *Free-Press*, comparing the police force to other cities and giving it as an example of how not to run a force. Hugo and Wharton almost exploded, but things did improve a lot. In fact, the force is now almost up to date — when it gets a chance to be."

"It's a nice house," Selma looked around. "This Tom Bates must have money."

"He has what's better than money," London said. "He has oil wells. But he's a nice guy in spite of it. He and his wife and two girls are in Europe now. So I run out here when I can get away from my office downtown, and my pay is all I can drink from Tom's cellar."

"Gee," Selma said, her fingers twined together. "Do you ever give parties? I can let you have my telephone number. I mean my home number."

"Fine," Max said agreeably. "I won't forget you, Selma. Now let's see — counting travel time out here, I owe you for four hours at twenty an hour. Right?"

He took four twenties from his wallet. Selma took them reluctantly, tucked them into an imitation alligator skin bag, and stood up.

"That means you want me to go. All right, Max. Anyway it's been fun. Sort of."

From her bag she took a notebook, tore off a leaf, and wrote down, *Selma Carle*, followed by an address and telephone number.

Max tucked the slip in his wallet. Selma went to get her model's hat box from the guest suite and returned. "Max," she asked, "what about the other pictures? The ones your brother Pete doesn't use. Will they — I mean, does he —"

"Keep them around to show to friends? No, baby, Pete's a nice guy, even though we do argue a lot. He'll destroy them."

"Well — could I have them? I mean — just to know how I look?"

She flushed, but her eyes met his. Max nodded.

"Sure, I'll mail them to you. Or bring them to you if I'm in the neighborhood. Don't let Roger see them, though. He might not understand."

He walked her through the house, out the street door, which was in the back, up the winding steps to the street where her old sedan was parked. She waved gaily and was gone. He went back into the house, got another glass of brandy and started thinking of Selma.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She had an essential innocence he'd almost forgotten a woman could have. Unless he was awfully wrong Selma was, in the fancy language of a coroner's report, *virgo intacta*. A virgin. Assuming she was about twenty-one, it represented a considerable achievement on her part. Far be it from him to terminate her self-chosen career of maidenhood just because of an impulse on her part. Let her marry Roger and settle down — later she'd thank him.

Before he got the thought straightened out, Max fell asleep.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN MAX SLEPT, he slept without dreaming. When he woke, he woke fast. He opened his eyes, instantly alert. Some sound that didn't belong in the house had penetrated to his consciousness. He waited, and it came again. The ring of the telephone in the hall.

He relaxed. Probably a call for Tom Bates. Still, he could answer it. Besides, it might be Pete. Pete knew he was here. He stood up, yawned, noted that the afternoon light had taken on the subdued clarity that precedes twilight, and padded out to the phone.

"Hello?" he said. The educated, Bostonian voice that answered was strange to him.

"Mr. London? This is your neighbor down the beach. My name is Grigsby."

"Yes, Mr. Grigsby?"

"I've rented this house for a few months, and just before Mr. Bates left I had the pleasure of meeting him. He told me you were going to look after his place for him and spoke very highly of you.

"Bates said," Grigsby continued, "that if I ever needed a private detective I couldn't do better than Max London. Well, I've decided I need one. I made up my mind after seeing you on the beach. You looked — competent."

"Thanks," Max said, still waiting.

"I wonder if you could drop over to see me?" Urgency crept into the other's voice. "I'd come over there, but my leg is bothering me and — well, Mr. London, I don't want to impose on you, but I frankly hope you will find it possible to help me."

Grigsby sounded both sincere and bothered. He also sounded like a very tired man. It was easier to say yes than no, so Max agreed to drop over in an hour and hung up. He rubbed his chin with his thumb and he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sauntered back to the cellarette and measured out another drink. Whatever it was on Grigsby's mind, it probably wasn't a divorce action. Not to judge by the pretty young brunette wife and the little boy he'd been walking with on the sand.

Max wondered how the blonde fitted into the household. She wasn't the secretary type, and she certainly wasn't anybody's sister.

He decided to spend the time developing the pics he had taken.

A couple of them were just right — Selma lying in the surf, nude enough to be stimulating but covered by enough water to be respectable in print. The one in which a wave had just broken into Selma's mouth was a honey. The rest were unsuitable for publication but much more interesting.

He hung them up in the bathroom to dry, cleaned up, then went back to the master bedroom to shower and dress. By the time he'd put on a sport shirt and flannels, and as an afterthought shaved, the hour was up.

The door was opened by the brunette he'd seen on the beach. She wore a yellow dress of pongee silk now, and leather strapped sandals.

"Mrs. Grigsby?" he asked. She nodded. "I'm Max London. Mr. Grigsby is expecting me."

"I — I'm not sure he can see anyone," she murmured, in a clear, little-girl voice. "He — he's very upset."

"He wanted to see me," London assured her. "But if he'd rather not talk to me now, I'll drop in later."

"I'll ask him. Won't you — come in and sit down?" Uncertainly she turned and led him into a big, well-furnished living room.

The brunette went down a hall and knocked, then opened a heavy oak door and went in. She came out a moment later.

"My husband will see you," she said.

"Thanks," Max said, and strode past her into what was apparently the library of the house. A massive carved desk stood near French windows that opened onto a small tiled terrace a couple of feet above the ground, almost screened by shrubbery. Grigsby sat behind the desk, his face drawn and grey. The knobbed cane he'd been using on the beach lay across his lap.

"Thank you, Nola," he said. "I don't want to be interrupted." The brunette closed the door and the tall man waved to a chair.

"Thank you for coming over," he said, as Max sat. "Excuse me for not getting up, but I twisted my ankle on Madison Avenue six weeks ago. Came out here to get some rest and relaxation, but so far it's eluded me. Maybe I can still get it if you can help me."

"If it's in my line. I'll tackle anything except divorce evidence."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's not that." Grigsby leaned back and closed his eyes a moment in a gesture of fatigue that went deeper than something just physical. "I suppose —" he opened his eyes again "— it's actually a matter for a lawyer. But there are other angles beside the purely legal one. Do you happen to know of a local gambler — at least he used to be one — named Marshall Dunn?"

"I don't place him."

"Well, he's a small operator, apparently. Four days ago I arrived here in California with my wife and child, and my business associate, Miss Parson, for a rest. I'm rather wrapped up in color television at the moment and I probably don't need to tell you it's a headache. My firm is Grigsby Electronics — you won't have heard of it."

Max did not contradict him, although he had read the name a couple of times in newspaper stories about the fight that was going on for control of the color television field.

Grigsby shook his head. "I don't mean to get started on myself," he said. "This matter is entirely aside from my business. But I'd hardly got settled here when Marshall Dunn phoned me and asked for an appointment. He came out yesterday. It turned out he had some IOU's he wanted me to honor — gambling debts."

"Yours?" London asked.

"Not mine. My wife's."

Max London's brow wrinkled. "But if you and your wife just got here —"

"Sorry." The other's voice held an added note of fatigue. "My present wife is my second. The IOU's were my first wife's. She is dead."

"Dead?" London's eyebrows rose. "When?"

"Two years ago. An automobile accident. In Reno. Just a week before her divorce decree was to be granted.

"I'll give you the whole picture, Mr. London. I married Larrie — that's short for Larraine — about eight years ago. She was a slender, sunny-haired blonde girl, very gay and very beautiful. She acted a little for radio and made a living that way. I happened to engage her while testing some television equipment. I confess I was swept off my feet. We were married inside three months.

"Frankly, I don't know whether things might have worked out differently if I had been a different type of man. Probably not. But my being an inventor didn't help any. When I'm wrapped up in some technical problem a friend has described me as being half scientist and half monk." The tall man gestured with his hand. "You see? Larrie was alone a lot. She never complained and I assumed she was happy. I suppose she was — but it wasn't I who was making her happy. Need I amplify the details?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max London shook his head.

"I dislike personal conflicts. I'm not afraid of anyone, but I like to keep my mind clear and unsullied by the violent emotions that accompany quarrels, recriminations, lawsuits. I can't work when I'm unsettled by emotional conflicts.

"Perhaps that was part of the trouble. But it couldn't be helped. Anyway, my lawyers made Larrie a proposition. I had grounds enough for a dozen divorces, but I'd let her get it. In Reno, with a ten thousand dollar cash settlement and nothing more, ever.

"She went to Reno. She wrote me occasionally during her stay, tentatively suggesting a reconciliation. I rejected all her advances. It was about that time, you remember, color television first became big public news. I hold several patents in the field. I felt sure, and I still do, that Larrie tried to go back on her bargain with me because she read my name in news stories and had visions of me becoming fabulously wealthy.

"Apparently Larrie was squeezing all the juice she could out of her stay in Reno. Among other things she took to gambling. I didn't realize to what extent until later.

"One evening I had a phone call from the Reno police. Larrie had been out in the convertible I'd let her keep, and she'd gone off the road. Apparently she was tipsy and speeding for fun — she loved to drive too fast. The car left the curve and she was thrown clear — then the car rolled on her. There wasn't — much left of her.

"I flew out and identified the body, then settled her debts, which were considerable. I saw to the funeral and came back to New York — with a certain feeling of relief, I confess."

Max London nodded. "Now about the IOU's. This man Dunn comes from Reno?"

"Yes. I checked. He used to run a small gambling place there but closed it and moved away about a year and a half ago. I understood he'd been caught using a wired wheel and left by request."

London nodded. "He'd certainly be requested to but hard," he commented. "The big operators there don't want the idea getting around you have to buck gimmicked games in Reno. But I can't picture this Marshall Dunn holding your dead wife's IOU's for two years. Particularly since he must have known you were there and settling up her debts. Seems to me that's when he'd have struck you for his money."

"Exactly," Grigsby said. "However, he has a plausible story. In any case, Mr. London, will you help me handle this matter?"

Max's brows corrugated. "I can't see where a private detective fits into it. I'm no lawyer but it's my impression a husband can be held liable only

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for debts contracted by his wife for the necessaries of life — food, shelter, clothing, medical care and so on. Gambling debts certainly don't come under that heading. All you have to do is refuse to pay."

"It's not that simple." Grigsby's long fingers clenched the knobbed stick in his hands. "I told Dunn that legally he had no claim against me. He arrogantly answered that he had claim enough to sustain a lawsuit. And he suggested that if I didn't pay the IOU's, I'd wish I had. He wasn't crude enough to make any actual threat, but the implication was plain that he would try to cause me trouble."

"Bluff."

"Probably. The point is, I can't be sure if the IOU's are genuine or not. It occurred to me he might have had one or two genuine IOU's and used them as models to forge more."

"How much do they total?"

"Twenty thousand dollars."

Max London whistled. "A lot for a wife getting a divorce to drop in five weeks. Did he show you the IOU's?"

"He gave me two photostats and said I could examine the originals any time at his office."

From the desk drawer Jonothan Grigsby took two documents and gave them to London. The detective glanced at the one on top. It was a positive print of a document handwritten on letterhead stationery. At the top, neatly printed, was the heading, *The Dunngeon. . . . Marshall Dunn, Proprietor. . . . Reno, Nevada.*

In a woman's bold, flowing hand beneath was written the date, *April 2, 1954*, and then a simple notation: *For value received I promise to pay upon demand the sum of one thousand, five hundred dollars. ($1,500)* Signed, *Mrs. Larraine Grigsby.*

"Technically, I'd say this was a promissory note, not an IOU," the detective remarked.

"I suppose so. Does it make any difference?"

"Legally? I don't know."

"Dunn claims the notes are not for gambling losses, but for money he loaned Larrie. He says that makes a difference."

"It might. I wouldn't know. But does the handwriting look like your former wife's?"

"Yes," Grigsby sighed. "It looks exactly like her handwriting. Of course I didn't see the original. As I said, there might be just one or two genuine documents in the lot."

"I wouldn't be surprised. But I still don't know quite what you want me to do."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Two things. First, see Dunn for me and satisfy yourself as to whether the notes are forged or genuine. If you decide they're genuine, I'll make him an offer to settle on a fair basis. Larrie after all was my wife, and I want to feel I've wiped her out of my life for good and all. Dunn gave the impression he needed cash badly, and even suggested he might consider a settlement. I have ten thousand dollars in cash here —" Grigsby tapped the top, right hand desk drawer — "which I drew out of the bank today, since this is Friday. I'll settle the notes for anything up to that sum, if you say they are genuine. I imagine it won't be difficult for you to have that point checked."

"All right, Mr. Grigsby," Max London said. "I'll do that for you. But I'll need a specimen of your former wife's handwriting."

"I have one here." Grigsby took another document from the desk. "It's a letter Larrie wrote me from Reno ten days before her death. It'll give you a genuine specimen of her handwriting for comparison purposes. I've jotted down Dunn's address on the back."

"Good. With luck I may have a report on the notes by evening."

"Thank you. I'm deeply grateful to you."

"No need to be. That's my business." Max grinned and rose, putting the two photostats and the letter into his pocket.

CHAPTER THREE

MARSHALL DUNN'S address proved to be a building on a small hill overlooking the Pacific, about twenty minutes drive away from Vista Beach, going north. It was an old building, the stucco in poor condition, and had probably gone through a lot of owners over the years.

The unlit neon sign outside it said The Dunngeon. It was a pun Marshall Dunn seemed to like. There were two cars in the parking lot — a sporty Packard convertible in robin's egg blue, and a conservative Buick sedan.

Max let his car skid to a stop on the gravel and climbed out. He strode past the main entrance of The Dunngeon, which was locked, turned a corner where the stucco was peeling, and headed for a door that said *Office*. Before he got to it he stopped. A side door was half open and through it he heard a woman's husky voice singing. He shouldered the door and stepped in. The woman was sitting at a mini-piano painted ivory, her back to him. She was a brunette with her hair in a shoulder length cut, and she wore only sandals, a white skirt, and a halter. Her back and shoulders were tanned

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and freckled and she was about twenty pounds overweight. Unless, of course, you liked them plump.

Her voice, as she sang to herself, was second rate. Good second rate, though. The husky, throaty tones held a curious vibrancy more compelling than many a better voice he had heard.

"Haven't heard that since Libby Holman sang it," Max remarked when she finished.

She turned around. "Hello," she said.

"We don't open until eight," she added. "But if you'd like a friendly drink —"

"Thanks," Max told her. "Some time when I'm not working."

"Oh? You're working?"

"Some business with Marshall Dunn. Is he around?"

"That depends."

"I'm here to discuss some promissory notes Dunn is trying to get Jonothan Grigsby to pay."

"Oh, that." She rose. "I'll get him."

She left the room, heading toward a small wing that apparently contained living quarters. She moved gracefully despite her surplus poundage.

He'd smoked a quarter of the cigarette when the woman came back, followed by a big man wearing fresh white ducks and a clean sport shirt. He looked as if he had been asleep and had just been waked up in a bad temper. His bigness was partly fat, but beneath the soft roundness of his shoulders and arms were heavy bones and good, if seldom used muscles.

"You want to see me?" His tone was deliberately brusque.

"That's right." London blew a considered puff of smoke. "If you're the same Dunn who was run out of Reno for being a crooked gambler."

"Why you —" Marshall Dunn took two quick steps toward him, his hands balling. The detective continued to lean lazily against the door jamb, and Dunn stopped.

"All right," he said. "Cut out the compliments and speak your piece. Meg says you're from Grigsby."

"I am." Max London flicked his cigarette out the open door behind him. "He sent me down to look over those notes you claim to hold."

"Did he send the money to pay for them?"

"There won't be any money unless I okay the notes. Maybe there won't be any anyway."

"There better be." Dunn's tone was sullen. "Meg," he said, without turning, "go to the safe and bring those notes of Mrs. Grigsby's. You know which folder."

She went through the door without answering.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max pulled a chair out of a stacked up pile and straddled it.

"While we're waiting for the documents," he said, "suppose you tell me why you held those notes two years and are suddenly trying to collect now."

"Who the hell are you that I should discuss my business with you?" Dunn scowled.

"The name is Max London and I'm Grigsby's representative. He wants me to be satisfied the notes are legitimate."

Dunn's round, protuberant eyes hooded at the detective's name. "All right, London. No reason for us to quarrel. What do you want to know?"

"Everything. Why you let the former Mrs. Grigsby run up such debts on your crooked wheel to begin with."

"Damn you, if —" Half rising, Dunn caught himself with an effort. "We're not going to get anywhere on this tack," he said, his tone smoldering. "My games were straight. Somebody planted a bug on one wheel and framed me."

Max shrugged. "All right, let's put it this way. Just give me the overall picture of how the notes originated."

"That's easy." Dunn relaxed a little. "Larrie — Mrs. Grigsby, that is — came into my place in Reno one night. Just reached town and she was a little blue. She bucked the wheel for awhile and won about fifty bucks. I bought her a drink, house policy for new customers.

"She felt like talking. She was a cute kid — frizzy golden hair and a figure like a teen-aged girl. She gave me a story of how her husband had fallen for his pretty secretary and decided to ditch her, so he'd framed her and shipped her to Reno."

"You fell for it?" Max asked with detached curiosity.

"Why not?" The big man shrugged. "It's happened before. She showed me his picture in the paper, along with an article about how he was in a fight over who'd control the future of color television, and told me he'd be worth a hundred million some day if he won out.

"He certainly looked like a cold fish, and I sympathized with her. Next night she came back and played again. This time she lost five hundred. She paid in cash. The following night, when she lost a thousand, she asked me to take a note. I took it."

"That's a lot of sympathy," Max observed.

"She said she was getting a cash settlement of fifty grand as soon as the decree went through," Dunn scowled. "But after she'd signed notes for another three G's I suggested she try some other establishment. I was nice about it — said my wheel might be unlucky for her. Different wheels act differently for different people, you know. She did try some of the other

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

houses. But she kept losing. They wouldn't take her IOU's. So she came to me, begging me to lend her money on her personal notes, and promising to pay off when she got her divorce settlement.

"From what the papers said about her husband's inventions in color TV, it was reasonable she would be getting plenty. I took a chance and loaned her the money. It's a straight debt and not a gambling debt."

"Without interest," Max pointed out. "I suppose you collected the interest in after-hours' entertainment."

Dunn refused to rise to the bait.

"She was a cute blonde kid and I liked her," he said. "That's all there was to it. She gambled too much, drank too much and drove too fast. I began to understand her husband might have something on his side too. Then — one night when she was tanked, she lost control of the car. And the curtain came down."

"Leaving you with a safe full of her notes," Max remarked. He puffed twin jets of smoke through his nostrils. "Grigsby appeared, settling her debts. That was your cue to demand payment. Your legal position was questionable and the time to strike was when he was badly upset by what had happened. Instead you waited two years. Why?"

"It was a calculated risk," Dunn said. "Frankly, as soon as I heard of Larrie's death I bought a credit report on Grigsby. It was bad, from my standpoint. He had all his capital tied up in his company and was fighting to hold on to his inventions. He didn't have twenty grand to spare. She'd lied. He'd have refused to pay me because he couldn't pay.

"So I decided to sit tight until he hit it big, then ask for payment. Being able to afford it and not wanting to be bothered by a ghost from the past, I figured he'd probably ante up then a lot easier."

"But Grigsby is still a long way from cashing in on color TV," Max pointed out. "Just the same, the minute he comes to California you strike him for payment. Why?"

"Because I need money," Dunn said bluntly. "Business is lousy. I can't afford to wait longer. I've got to raise cash."

"Suppose I tell Grigsby the notes are forgeries?" Max London suggested. "Or that they're genuine, but he refuses to pay? Then what? Even if you brought suit against him and somehow won, it could easily take a couple of years."

"There are other ways. I might discount the notes."

"Discount a dead woman's promissory notes?" Max scoffed. "Who'd be stupid enough to give money for them?"

"I was thinking of Tony Rienzo," he said, malice in his voice. "He's going legit now. He likes such speculations. And he has a very efficient

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

collection organization. People who owe him money — or even people he just thinks owe him money — are generally glad to pay him."

Max London dragged on the cigarette and considered this. Tony Rienzo. The local Big Boy himself. Quietly spreading his tentacles through the rich, sprawling city of Vista Beach. With, undoubtedly, some inside help from somebody in the relatively new reform administration.

"Bull," Max said aloud. "Rienzo wouldn't be interested in a profit of a few grand. He plays for blue chips."

"I could interest him. The notes total thirty G's, for one thing."

"You told Grigsby twenty."

"I was sounding him out. I didn't want him to refuse automatically."

"I've a damned good mind to tell you where to stuff them!"

"Then I'll take them to Rienzo. I'll suggest to him that even though Grigsby can't pay in money, he could be persuaded to sign over a part interest in his color TV patents. That would interest Rienzo, believe me. He'd like nothing better than to ride color television when it starts skyrocketing. He might wind up being as respectable as RCA."

Meg came back in. She bounced a little as she walked. Nicely. She had a sheaf of papers in her hand.

"Spread them out, honey," Dunn said. "Let Grigsby's trained shamus look them over."

Deftly she arranged the papers on the table so that they did not overlap each other. Max strode over and stared down at them. All were letterhead paper from *The Dunngeon* in Reno. The dates covered about four weeks, from March 10 to April 3, 1954. The sums varied from five hundred to four thousand dollars. There were about twenty in all and the total, roughly, was just over $30,000.

They had been written with two or three different pens and inks. Max concentrated on the signatures. They were all similar, but not identical, not tracings.

"Well?" Dunn asked.

Max selected two notes, dated a week apart. They totaled fifteen hundred dollars.

"Wait a minute!" The gambler's hand clamped on his wrist. "Nobody said you could walk off with them."

Max broke the hold with a twist of his arm. He stiff-armed the half-risen man back into his chair.

"You'll get them back. If they're genuine. I'm going to have the signatures checked."

"Let him have them, Marsh," the brunette, Meg, said, her eyes on the detective. "It's cheap enough if he does keep them."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If they're phonies," Max said, looking down at Dunn with distaste, "I'll burn them. And I'll come back and burn the rest. Then I'll discuss the whole matter with you. I'm apt to be a little rough."

"Talk's cheap," Dunn sneered. He stood up, shrugging. "Anyway, I don't care who you go to. He'll tell you those notes are genuine. Larrie Grigsby wrote every one of them and I saw her do it."

"It wouldn't surprise me," the detective agreed, folding the notes into a manila envelope he had brought. "But just because the handwriting is genuine it doesn't mean the debt is. The whole deal smells to me. I just wonder if you and the blonde floosie didn't cook up something to rook her husband. She knew she was only getting a ten thousand settlement and maybe she didn't figure it was enough."

"Damn you!" Dunn spat. "If you feed Grigsby a line like that, I'll sure as hell take these notes to Rienzo. Then you and Grigsby both will wish you'd played it nice before —"

Max's fist punctuated the speech. Dunn went down on one knee, shook his head and came up with a springing charge. His roundhouse right missed but his shoulder caught Max in the side. The detective staggered back, reaching for support. His fingers hooked something soft that broke away, and he backpedaled fast to keep from falling. He brought up against the service bar with a crash of bottles, and as Dunn charged after him Max cocked his left fist and threw it.

Dunn's own impetus carried him into the fist and he stopped like a truck slamming into a tree. His head snapped back, the grimace of rage smoothing out of his face, and he dropped. He lay on his back without quivering.

"He thinks he's tough. I haven't been able to convince him he loses his temper too easily to be tough."

Max looked up. Meg was still standing beside the table where the notes were spread out. From the waist up she had nothing on, and he saw then that he had her broken halter in his hand.

He tossed it to her. She caught it but made no move to replace it. From the waist up she was tanned lightly and evenly. Max revised his former estimate. In one essential department, anyway, he wouldn't call any of her weight excessive. She looked down at herself without embarassment.

"I'm Meg Philips," she said, and held up the broken halter. "Come back some time and do this when you mean it."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER FOUR

MAX HEADED DOWNTOWN toward his office, almost an hour's drive by the time he wound inland on twisting feeder routes and then bucked the traffic of a typically overgrown and underplanned Southern California city. He drove fast. He always drove fast when he felt good.

He hadn't had to get rough with Dunn. Losing his temper had been an act. But he had got Dunn sore, and by making a man angry you could often tell a lot more about him in a hurry than you could even by getting him drunk. Dunn was hot-headed and liked to push people around, but he folded fast when he met somebody bigger. More important, he'd gotten sore but he hadn't acted worried.

That didn't necessarily mean the notes were genuine, but it certainly meant that Dunn thought they were genuine. Nat French would settle the question. Before he reached his office-apartment, in a new but not too expensive building eight or ten blocks from the center of town, Max stopped at Nat's office. Nat French was a slender, hollow-chested, bespectacled man with a passion for peering into microscopes. He had started life as a research chemist, but quickly learned that research chemists are apt to make less than plumbers. So he had switched over and become a consulting criminologist.

Handwriting comparison and document authentication were specialities of Nat's. Max dropped off the two promissory notes and the letter Grigsby had given him, with a request that Nat take a quick look at them.

"If a look is what you really want," Nat grunted, "I can give you a quick once-over by six-thirty."

"Just a look. If anything seems out of line I want you to follow it up. But primarily I want to know if these papers were written by the woman who is supposed to have written them."

Nat looked over the documents, handling them gingerly by the edges. "Plenty of comparison material here," he said. "Okay, I'll phone you. Your apartment?"

Max told him yes and left. He was going through the lobby of his apartment house when Lem, the clerk at the desk called to him.

"Just wanted to tell you, Mr. London," he said confidentially. "There's someone waiting for you in your apartment. It's a dame," Lem said, all but rubbing his skinny hands together. "I mean a lady. But what a lady!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Anyone who's been here before?" Max asked.

"I don't think so. That is, she wore one of these floppy straw hats that kind of hid her face and she had on sunglasses besides. But anybody could tell she was a real lady. She seemed upset when you weren't in and asked if there was anyplace to wait beside the lobby. So I said you'd told me to let clients wait in your apartment if they seemed okay —"

"That's okay," London told him. "How long ago was this?"

"About forty-five minutes. I had Tim, on the elevator, let her in. But I dunno if she stayed."

"You don't know?"

"Come to think of it, a little while ago I saw somebody wearing the same kind of hat go out the front door. Maybe she got tired and left."

"She'll come back," Max decided, "if it's important."

"There was somebody else too. He didn't give his name but I think I've seen his picture in the papers. I think it was this Nelson Hugo, the new police chief."

"Nellie Hugo?" Max's brows rose. "Paying me a social call?"

"He didn't say if it was social or not. He looked sore, Mr. London. He was here about fifteen minutes ago and I said you hadn't come in and I didn't know when you'd be back. He left, I think."

"Thanks, Lem. I won't forget what a help you are," Max said and took the elevator to his sixth floor office-apartment.

He strode down the corridor, getting out his key. But as he stopped outside the green-painted door he heard movement inside. So the woman hadn't left after all.

He opened the door and stepped in. Someone was waiting for him but it wasn't a lady. A tall, thin man with a face like a dishonest vulture sat in the leather easy chair, a rolled newspaper in his hand. Max would have interpreted the expression on the other man's face as a scowl if he hadn't known that was Chief Nelson Hugo's normal look.

"Well, Nellie Hugo!" he said with an air of happy surprise. "Come in and sit down. Make yourself at home."

The police chief unfolded himself from the easy chair. "I came here to talk to you, London," he said. "Your door was ajar so I came in and sat down."

"And looked around while you were here," he said. "My desk drawer is open an inch and my file cabinet isn't quite closed, either. Your technique is lousy. I don't keep anything out in the open anyway," Max London assured him. "It's all in a safe guaranteed to take at least three hours for an expert can cutter to blow. All right, talk."

Nelson Hugo unrolled the paper in his hand. "This!" he snapped.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The paper unrolled to an article with a headline that screamed WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE BIG CLEANUP? It was signed, *Peter London.* Peter had written it, partly from material Max dug up and partly from material supplied by Wayne Ferris, publisher of the Vista Beach Free Press, who was independently wealthy and more interested in civic betterment than in profits — a refreshing attitude in a publisher.

Max took the paper and pretended to scan the article. "Very nice," he approved.

Nelson Hugo grabbed the paper, ripped it up and threw it in the waste-basket.

"London," he grated, "that article was aimed at me, personally. And I'm not going to stand for it. Since I was appointed chief of police we've driven out the pinball boys, scared the drug peddlers elsewhere —"

"And made room for a new lot of thugs who are going to make the old gang look like Sunday school superintendents, when they really get going," Max told him. "Just because Tony Rienzo is playing them close to his vest and making like a member of the civic betterment league, doesn't fool anybody who can look at Rienzo's record. The East got too hot for him. Now he's here, running the Hi-Spot, the biggest gambling set-up on the Coast, and everything cozy. And obviously he's setting up the organization so that he can clean up big when he has corrupted this town enough to make it safe. Starting with one bad apple in the barrel, he's going to turn all the rest rotten. You know it and I know it. So let's not kid around, Nellie."

Nelson Hugo was breathing hard. "All right, London," he said. "I came here to warn you. You've stepped out of line too many times in this town — beat up men against whom there was no evidence, intimidated witnesses, and a dozen other charges."

"Funny," Max said, unsmiling, "that every time it happened, a case the cops were falling down on got solved."

"Hereafter," Nelson Hugo said, "if you so much as spit in the street, your license gets suspended. You really should get a San Quentin vacation for some of the stuff you've pulled, and if it's in my power, or Fred Wharton's, the acting D.A., you'll get it."

Max opened the door. "Wharton's fat, fussy and foolish, but he's honest," he growled. "You're neither fat, foolish, nor honest. Now get out, and if you ever pussyfoot around my apartment again, I'll kick your teeth loose — from the opposite end."

Nelson Hugo grabbed up his hat and started out. Max casually gave him a shove that sent him jolting against the opposite corridor wall, and closed the door.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He crossed toward the bathroom. As he did so the bedroom door, which had been standing open about an inch, closed very quietly. Max checked his stride.

He turned and stared at the closed door. Then he stepped to his desk and took out the .32 he kept in the center drawer. He shoved off the safety catch and dropped it into his pocket, letting his hand remain on the butt. Then he moved softly to the door and tried the knob with his left hand. It resisted — someone inside was holding it. Then abruptly the resistance ceased.

Max shoved the door open and stood back. "All right," he said. "Come out and come slowly."

There was no response for a moment. Then a woman appeared from behind the door and unwillingly faced him.

She held her floppy straw hat in her hands and she had removed the dark glasses. Her honey-ash hair was done in a tight but becoming bun at the nape of her neck. She wore a simple, expensive suit of tan linen, with a short-sleeved jacket which was buttoned all the way up to her throat, but which defeated any intentions of modesty by emphasizing the fullness beneath it.

Her eyes, Max could see now, were blue with flecks of golden brown in the blue, and her brows and lashes were darker than her hair.

Her face and arms, every exposed square inch of her skin, were flaming pink.

Max took his hand out of his pocket. "Well," he said, "I see you did get sunburned after all."

The woman's eyes met his. "No," she said. "It's not sunburn. It's embarrassment. I'm blushing."

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM A CABINET in a corner Max got a bottle and two glasses. He brought them to the leather-covered coffee table, put them down, and moved up a chair for her.

"The sun is over the yard arm," he remarked. "Since you came to see me, sit down and see me."

She sat down with composure. "Thank you, I will have a drink."

"This is aquavit," Max said, pouring two shotglasses. "A good old Swedish drink. I should have asked you if you liked it."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thank you, this is fine. If I could have some water—"

He brought the water. She took alternate sips of aquavit and water. The pink was fading now from her arms and face. As it went, the faintly red network of scars between her left cheekbone and her ear reappeared. Max watched it, then became aware she realized it.

"I apologise for staring at you," he said. "Also for doing the same this afternoon."

"It's all right. I'm quite used to it. I've been stared at since I was seventeen."

"Seventeen?" Max looked judicious. "You must have been quite precocious."

"I beg your pardon?" She looked at him blankly.

"What did *you* mean?" he asked.

"This." She touched her cheek. "I was doing an experiment in chemistry, my last year in high school. A beaker of acid exploded. It left me — badly scarred. Naturally, people have stared at me ever since."

"I see." Max drained his glass and refilled it. "This afternoon I gathered that you weren't interested in having any conversation with me. Now I come in and find you hiding in my bedroom. Does that mean you've changed your mind?"

"This afternoon I said that if I ever needed to ask for advice I'd come to you." Her tone was even. "Of course that was meant — sarcastically. However, I decided to act on it. I came here for help. I wanted to engage you professionally."

"I see." Max leaned back and grinned at her amiably. "All right, let's talk. Begin by telling me your name and whether this professional help you want concerns Jonothan Grigsby."

"My name is Patricia Parson. I'm a minority partner in Grigsby Electronics. And what I wanted to see you about does concern him."

"Let me get something straight, Miss Parson," Max said. "It was you who about an hour ago asked for me down at the desk, and the desk clerk sent you up here with the elevator boy?"

"He said it was customary," Patricia Parson answered stiffly.

"Anyway, you were here when Nellie Hugo pushed his way in?"

Patricia Parson nodded. "I had just made up my mind not to wait any longer. I was standing up to go when someone knocked on the door. Then I noticed it wasn't latched. I slipped into the bedroom and closed the door and locked it.

"Then the apartment door opened and someone came in. I heard him moving around very quietly. Drawers opening and things like that.

"Well," the woman said, "I was — upset. I waited for whoever it was to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

go away so I could slip out too. But then you came. When I heard your voice I opened the door a fraction to —"

"Listen?" Max supplied. "To get a cue on what to say to me?" She nodded. "Well, that brings us up to date. Now we can talk about what brought you here in the first place, Miss Parson."

"I'm sorry." She stood up. "I've changed my mind about engaging your services. I felt I owed you an explanation of why I was here. But I'd rather not go any further with the matter."

"Okay." Max shrugged. "That's your privilege. However, if it's about those notes a gambler named Dunn is trying to get Grigsby to pay, I'm already checking that."

"Notes? A gambler named Dunn?" She frowned. "I don't know anything about that. No, it's —"

The telephone interrupted her. Max muttered an apology and scooped up the instrument. The voice that spoke was Nat French's.

"Got that report for you," he said, in his own dry, precise fashion. "The handwriting on the promissory notes is genuine. Not a chance that it's faked."

"Fingerprints?" he asked. "I know I didn't mention them but —"

"I just happened to check on them," Nat understated drily. "Several clear sets of prints. One set unidentified. One set is yours —"

"Mine?" Max London interjected. "How do you know it's mine?"

Over the phone Nat French chuckled. "The first time you were in my office," he said. "I offered you a cigarette."

"Yes, but what —"

"It was a nice, polished crystal cigarette case — took your prints beautifully. But we were talking about those promissory notes. The other set of prints belongs to the writer of the notes. I matched them against her prints on the authenticated letter you gave me. Everything seems to be in order — the dead woman wrote those notes, all right. On one she used an Eversharp fountain pen. On the other —"

"She could have used a goose quill as long as it was she who wrote it," London told him. "Thanks, Nat. Send in your bill."

He hung up and looked across at Patricia Parson, who was standing, bag in her hands.

"Don't hurry. I may be going your way, and I can give you a lift. By the way, what is Grigsby's phone number?"

She told him. He dialed, waited a moment, then heard Jonothan Grigsby's weary voice answering.

"London speaking," he said. "I have a report on those notes. They're genuine."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A brief pause. "I see. I rather thought they were."

"Anything else you want me to do on the matter?"

"Thank you, yes. I intend to phone Marshall Dunn and suggest he come out to the house tonight to discuss the matter. I'll offer him a fair settlement — anything up to the ten thousand dollars I mentioned to you. I would appreciate it if you could sit in on the conference with us. I believe your presence might be — helpful."

"Glad to," Max agreed. "It'll only mean dropping over from next door."

"I'll phone you back when I've been in touch with Dunn, and let you know what time."

They said goodbye and hung up. Max turned to Patricia Parson with regret. "Sorry," he said. "Seems I don't have a date with Grigsby until later. But if a dinner would interest you —"

"No thank you." She started toward the door.

"Then perhaps we'll meet later, or possibly tomorrow. I do a lot of sunbathing myself, and since we're neighbors —"

"I'm afraid it's not likely," she said. "I'm no longer staying out there as Grigsby's guest. Jonothan and I quarreled, this afternoon. I moved out. I've taken an apartment at the Beverly for the time being." Her eyes met his for a moment, gravely. "Goodbye, Mr. London."

After the door had closed behind her, Max London stared at it for a moment reflectively. Then he got his Panama and went out. The Seahorse Grill was a few blocks from his apartment, behind the modernistic city hall, which housed the jail, the morgue, and all local governing bodies under one roof in its ten stories. None except the very high priced restaurants in town were too good, but the Seahorse was better than most in the modest price class.

In a booth at the back Cal McVey was drinking alone. Cal was a big man with a craggy face and a long chin. He was too honest to be popular with his superiors in the police department, so he stayed a lieutenant in plainclothes, Homicide Division. On the other hand he was too capable for any police chief to get along without, so he remained a fixture of the department, drawing all the tough assignments, without asking any favors from anyone.

Once, though almost no one knew it, Cal had been the victim of an ingenious pay-off frameup good enough to have drawn him three-to-five in the pen, especially with some unfriendly political muscle to push the charge. The operator who had laid out the frame, in retaliation for McVey's having picked up some of his boys, had enough political power to protect his two semi-respectable witnesses from the kind of police grilling which would break down their story. But Max had no connection with the cops, and no appreciation of the finer niceties of legalistics.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max had simply inveigled both men into a room with him and locked the door. When he finally unlocked it, he had handwritten statements from both of them which he gave to McVey to keep if needed. The two witnesses he personally escorted to the airport and saw onto a plane headed for Chicago. They left without bothering to pack, and they didn't come back.

Neither Max nor Cal McVey ever bothered to refer to the incident, but the detective lieutenant had the kind of Scots blood in him that neither forgets a friend nor forgives an enemy. The official police attitude toward Max London was one of hostility, but McVey was, in his own sphere, as independent as a moss-backed snapping turtle.

He looked at Max dourly as the private detective slid into the booth opposite him.

"What do you hear about Tony Rienzo?" Max asked.

"You're interested in Rienzo?" Cal asked.

"I'm not interested in him. Not yet, anyway. I'm interested in someone who mentioned his name this afternoon."

"Rienzo is spinning his web right now," Cal said. "He's only operating in a small way so far. He's got gambling at the Hi-Spot, and he's spotting a few numbers writers down in the factory area in the valley. A trial run, really. He's getting vice organized and is quietly preparing to plant reefer pushers around — particularly outside the schools. He's got a steady stream of fancy thugs drifting in from the East, and from Mexico, and he's been holding strategy meetings. No rough stuff is the watchword — no killings. Nothing to make the public stop, look and wonder."

Max London nodded. "Does the name Marshall Dunn mean anything to you?" he asked.

"Don't tell me you're doing a job for a tinhorn like Dunn!" McVey rasped. "Not trying to get him off the hook with Rienzo!"

"Is he on the hook?" Max sucked his lower lip. "That would explain something's been puzzling me."

"Rienzo's been bored by inactivity," the detective lieutenant told him. "Rienzo gets his pleasure out of making other people squirm, and Dunn is one of the ones he's been putting the heat on. Dunn has a gambling joint just over the line —"

"I know. I was there."

"Well, Rienzo has dropped in on Dunn several times lately. He and his boys have gambled on Dunn's wheel."

"Rienzo gambling in a two-bit joint?" London scowled. "That doesn't add."

"It adds," McVey told him. "When you know Rienzo. Dunn is using a wired wheel. Naturally he doesn't dare use it on Rienzo. As I hear it, he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

used it in reverse — trying to make Rienzo win a few bucks so he'd be in a good temper. But Rienzo crossed him up a couple times by dropping bundles of lettuce on the numbers just before the wheel stopped. Dunn didn't dare squawk and Rienzo got to him for twelve, fifteen thousand. Dunn had to give Rienzo an IOU for half of it."

"That's the answer then," Max London said with satisfaction. "The reason Dunn is so anxious to get dough out of a client of mine right now. Now if you could just estimate how much Dunn actually owes Rienzo —"

"Between six and seven thousand, I hear."

"We'll say seven. He'll settle for that. Going to eat?"

"Working," McVey told him.

He finished his drink and slid out. Max ordered a porterhouse with fried potatoes and a green salad and ate alone. Things began to make sense. He knew now why Dunn had suddenly dug those promissory notes out of the safe. Jonothan Grigsby's arrival in California had come just as he was desperate to pay off Rienzo. Even though he knew Grigsby's financial condition and couldn't hope to collect the whole sum, he was willing to grab at anything to get out of Rienzo's clutches.

And there was his threat to turn the notes over to Rienzo. Despite the dubious collectability of the notes, it would be better to pay off a reasonable sum than to get entangled with the Big Boy. And since Grigsby was willing to pay off, there was no reason the whole thing couldn't be washed up quickly and easily.

Max finished and headed back toward his apartment. There were two messages waiting for him at the desk. Both were from Grigsby. The first, which had come in about seven, asked him to be at the house for the conference with Dunn at eleven-thirty. The second asked him to call Grigsby as soon as he came in.

The detective put the call through from the lobby.

"I'm sorry, Mr. London," Grigsby said apologetically over the phone. "I have to call off our meeting with Dunn. I — I'm not feeling well this evening. I wondered if you could act for me — see Dunn and negotiate a settlement of those notes."

"Glad to," London agreed. "Any figure up to ten thousand, right?"

"That's the top limit. If you can get Dunn to agree to less, the difference will be your fee. Is that satisfactory?"

"I should be able to make a nice profit on that," Max told him. "I'll report to you as soon as I've seen him."

"Please do. I have the money here in five hundred dollar bills, as you know. It'll be available first thing in the morning — or even tonight if you can come to an understanding with him immediately."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll drive out and see him now." Max London hung up and reached into his pocket for a cigarette. His fingers closed on the gun he had put there earlier in his apartment, and forgotten. Though he hadn't planned to carry a gun, and probably wouldn't need one, it wouldn't do any harm to have it with him. After all, he had a license for it.

He headed for his car and five minutes later was going north through the late twilight toward The Dunngeon.

CHAPTER SIX

He was still a mile from The Dunngeon when a Packard convertible zipped past him at seventy. It was too dark to get a good look at the driver. He could only make out that it was a woman. But he thought he recognized the car. And when he wound up the drive and pulled into the parking lot outside The Dunngeon it was there, Meg Philips still sitting behind the wheel, lighting a cigarette. To his surprise, there were no other cars and the place was dark, the neon sign unlit.

"Closed tonight," the brunette announced as he pulled up beside her. "Oh, it's you." She smiled. "Come to see me or Marsh?"

"Dunn." He climbed out and walked over. She was wearing a dress this evening, a simple white model with a jacket.

"Oh?" Her tone was interested. "You're figuring to settle it tonight?"

"Why not? He needs money and I'm here to offer him some."

"In that case —" she slipped easily out of the car — "come in and I'll buy a drink. Maybe I can locate him."

He followed her down the sidewalk and into the dark interior. Meg Philips flicked a switch and the wall lights came on, orchid tinted and hardly bright enough to be called illumination. From the service bar she brought a bottle and two glasses.

"Scotch?"

"It'll do."

She poured. "How much?"

"That's enough. To start."

"I mean how much money." She handed him the glass.

"No more than necessary. Enough to get him off Rienzo's hook."

She shot him a glance. "You know about that?"

"I've heard."

"The slob!" For a moment her lips were tight and her voice cold with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hatred. "The little, fat-bellied slob! Coming in here with those two torpedoes of his, those filthy mirror image twins, and needling Marsh! Making Marsh afraid to let him lose — then after he's cleaned out Marsh's working capital, giving him only a week to pay off!"

Max interrupted her. "I didn't come here to discuss Rienzo. Where's Dunn?"

"He's out trying to raise some working capital. I'll see if I can locate him by phone."

"Tell him the eleven-thirty date at Grigsby's place is off. He and I are to talk directly."

Meg disappeared into an inner room, apparently an office. Max waited. She came back shaking her head.

"One place he'd just been, the other he hadn't reached yet. I left word to call here. If you don't mind waiting."

"I've been in worse places with worse company. Did Dunn go to see Rienzo tonight?"

"I don't know." Meg was looking worried. "He had a phone call and he left in a lousy temper. He was frightened. He always loses his temper when he's frightened."

"Other times too."

She nodded. "If he had more self-control he might be a first-rater. But he's not."

"You married to him?"

Meg lit a cigarette. "Marriages are made in heaven," she said. "I've never been there."

"Been with him long?"

"A year and a half. It seems longer. But we get along. Marsh isn't a bad guy outside of business hours."

"Pick up with him in Reno?"

She looked at him and shook her head. "Here. After he left Reno. By request."

"Then you never knew Larrie Grigsby, the woman who signed those notes?"

"No, I never met her. Marsh told me a little about her."

"You knew about these notes before this?"

"Not until he trotted them out. Ask me about something else, Max. Marsh's business bores me. We could talk about you. Or me."

Max looked at his watch. "I want to wrap this thing up. But I can't wait all night."

"He should have called back by now." There was uneasiness in her grey eyes. "Look." Meg stood up. "Let me go look for him. In my car. I'll bring

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him back here. I want to get this thing settled and get Rienzo off his neck for my own peace of mind."

"I'll follow you."

"No." She shook her head. "There's a couple of places he might be, he'd be sore if I led you there. Wait here. Keep a drink warm for me."

"All right," he agreed. "I'll wait a reasonable time. Phone me if you find him. If you don't phone, I'll contact him tomorrow."

"I'll phone," she said. "Marsh can use that money tonight. Make yourself at home. Drink anything you can find."

She went out. A moment later he heard the Packard roar to life, gravel spurting beneath its air cushion tires as it went away.

He finished a *Max London* cigarette and had another Scotch. Then he rose and prowled around the place. He found the door that probably led to the gambling room. It was locked, but it gave when he put a shoulder to it. It was strictly a small time layout — a single roulette wheel, a chuckaluck cage, a crap table and a row of slot machines against the wall. He lifted the dust cover from the roulette wheel and spun it experimentally. It turned smoothly and softly. He flicked his wrist and sent the ball rolling against the wheel's rotation. It dropped into 33. He tried it again. Once more it dropped into 33.

This wheel he recognized as one he had seen listed in a recent catalog he had sent for — *The Secret Green Book*, it was called, for some mystic reason. He could remember the printed spiel for the wheel word for word:

This is the most satisfactory Controlled Roulette Outfit ever produced, no batteries, no paraphernalia, the outfit is complete as you see in the illustration. All ready to operate. You can put the ball in any number at any time and need have no fear of detection.

Likewise for dice that could be manipulated, cards that could be recognized in half a dozen different ways, punchboards on which the store owner could punch out the prize winning numbers in advance, and twenty other items, all of them designed with infinite skill to empty the pockets of suckers.

Intent on studying the wheel, Max had not heard anyone else enter the building, and did not know he wasn't alone until a voice behind him said: "Well, Dunn, got my money for me?"

The spinning ball dropped into 33 again. Max turned. Just inside the door stood three men. The one in the middle was short, with a body like a pouter pigeon on spindly legs. He wore a suit of dark blue Irish linen that had been hand-tailored for a tab of at least two hundred and fifty dollars. The hand-made Panama on his oversize head was a seventy-five dollar job.

Flanking him on each side was a taller, thinner, younger man. They looked like twins — mirror image twins with every feature identical but

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reversed. They wore identical linen suits, similar to but a lot cheaper than the small man's. Their Panamas were blocked the same but the one on the right wore his with the brim tipped down right, the one on the left wore the brim tipped down left. Right Side had his right hand in his jacket pocket. Left Side had his left hand.

Their faces were thin, their lips were thin. Their eyes had a curious alert blankness, like the eyes of a dangerous animal that gives no thought to the minute past or the minute ahead, only to the present moment. They flanked the man in the middle like two tall bookends holding up a short fat book.

"It ain't Dunn," the bookend on the left said, with an air of making a discovery.

"Hell," the bookend on the right said in a flat voice. "It's that lousy eye Max London."

"Shut up," the man in the middle said. "What are you doing here, London? Where's Dunn?"

"What are you doing here, Rienzo?" Max grunted. "Where's Dunn? See, I can ask the same questions."

"Wise guy." Small round eyes so dark the iris and retina merged like twin black holes in the other man's face surveyed London coldly. "I've heard about what a wise guy you are."

"Fine," Max answered. "And I've heard about what a sonofabitch you are. That starts us off even."

"Hey!" the righthand flanker grated, in a tone of surprise. "There ain't nobody can't talk to Mr. Rienzo like that." He stepped forward with the lunge of a jungle cat, bringing his hand out of his pocket. It held a foot-long section of quarter-inch logging chain on a leather thong that went around his wrist.

"Okay, Mr. Rienzo?" he asked hopefully, without looking around.

"Okay," the small man said, his expression not altering. "Let's see how tough this eye really is. Just in case our paths ever cross again. Once over lightly, Righty."

Righty took two more strides toward Max London and brought up the chainjack, which could rip away flesh with a slash, and break bones if it landed right. Max put up his hand as if to guard himself and Righty swung for his wrist.

If the chain had struck, Max's hand would have been half amputated. But as it came down Max braced himself against the roulette table behind him, lifted his knee to his chest, and drove the flat of his foot outward.

His heel caught Righty just below the ribs. His sole crunched in the lower ribs, and the thrust of the kick doubled the tall hood over like a folding

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rule. He went backwards across the room, crashed into a slot machine, and carried it over backwards. As the machine fell, Righty fell on it, wheezing with desperate sucking sounds, trying to get air into his collapsed diaphragm. Blood was dribbling from his mouth. When the man and the machine both came to rest, Righty was on his back, his head jammed against the wall, his legs in the air over the fallen slot machine.

After a frozen instant to watch Righty fall, his twin brother came forward with a leap.

"Lefty, hold it!" Rienzo shouted, but the hoodlum, his thin face twisted with fury, was beyond control.

"You cain't do that to mah brother!" he screamed as he came, swinging a chainjack viciously with his left hand.

The chainjack came down. Max ignored the man, focused all his attention on the hand, the wrist and the chain. The chain was an invisible smear of light, but the hand and wrist moving it were better targets for his eyes.

Max stretched up his own open hands as the chain came down. The thin wrist settled into his palms, driving his braced arms downwards. The chain, half its force lost, cracked against his shoulder with searing pain. Then his hands, holding the wrist, ignoring the kicking and clawing Lefty was doing, moved apart six inches, one gripping the wrist, the other the forearm just below the elbow.

Max London brought Lefty's arm down like a stick of kindling wood against the edge of the roulette table, and bone snapped with a brittle crack. Hand and wrist were suddenly at right angles to the arm, with a white stub of bone piercing jaggedly through the skin.

Lefty screamed and his knees sagged. He flopped sideways against Max, jaw loose, eyes bulging from sheer pain until they seemed on the point of falling out. Then Max straightened him up and swung his fist. Lefty's screaming was abruptly silenced as his legs gave way completely and he flopped at Rienzo's feet, wriggling as if boneless. He looked up at Max, eyes glazed and lips pulled back with pain and horrible hatred. Lefty flopped like a dying eel and was quiet at last.

Max stared at Tony Rienzo, who had moved only to draw back from the squirming body of his torpedo.

"That's how tough I am, Rienzo," Max London said softly, feeling his shoulder where the chainjack had struck. "Now how much would you like?"

The round, bullet-hole eyes stared at him. Rienzo licked his lips, darted a glance to the twins on the floor, and back to Max. "I like the way you operate," he said. "You've spoiled my boys for good, but I could overlook that."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If what?"

"You're a good man. I could use a man with your talents. Not actively associated with me at all. Just looking after my interests in this town — my legit interests." He waited. "Fifty grand a year sound good to you?"

"Fifty grand a day sounds better," Max snorted. "That's what it would take to hire me, you perverted little punk. Just because a mangy job lot of killers and politicians are willing to sell themselves to you for small change, you think you can buy a man? Working for you would be like living in the lower half of an outhouse."

"Jesus," Rienzo said, almost in wonder. "You do like trouble, don't you?"

"I don't like it but I don't duck it."

"You're going to have plenty to not duck then."

"If these two displaced hillbillies give me any trouble, or anybody else that I even think comes from you, it'll be you, personally, I take it up with. And don't think I won't make it. You saw what just happened. Just figure the next boys you send out may fail too, and then I'll be coming after you."

Max strode past him and left the plump little man staring with hooded eyes at the two figures on the floor. As he went out the door he heard Rienzo spinning the telephone dial.

He found his car, with a long black sedan parked behind it. Driving gingerly, he headed toward the exclusive beach section. His shoulder hurt and he was feeling ugly.

He headed for the beach now because Grigsby was counting on him to contact Dunn. And Dunn didn't have any way of knowing that the date had been called off. The one place Dunn was certain to go was Grigsby's at eleven-thirty. If Max could get there before Dunn did, he could intercept him and settle for the promissory notes on the spot.

It was eleven fifteen when Max pulled to a stop in the drive above the big beach house. Next to it Tom Bates' residence was dark and silent.

He went down the stairs from the drive and along the flagstoned walk to the big, brass-studded door. There were no lights on in the house, at least none visible from this side. Grigsby might have gone to bed, but Max guessed he'd by staying up for his report.

With his hand on the antique knocker, Max paused. If Grigsby was asleep, no use waking him. He could walk around the house and if Grigsby wasn't in his library-office, he'd go back up to the drive and wait in the car for Dunn.

He turned back and took the gravel path that ran through high, flowering shrubs around the side of the house. He walked slowly, his feet crunching on the gravel, until he rounded the rear wing of the house and saw ahead of him the glow of light shining on shrubbery.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He headed toward it. The bushes were thick, but he could see the tall French windows of the library. He paused, to see if he could spot a path through the shrubs to the little balcony outside the windows. It was because he was looking carefully at the ground and the bushes that he saw the folded sheet of paper on the grass at the base of a thick clump of greenery.

The grass was damp with dew, but the half of the paper above the fold stood up stiff and crisp, unaffected by the moisture. It couldn't have been there long and it certainly hadn't blown out a window, though one stood open. The shrubbery would have caught it.

Max took a step forward and stooped for it. There was a movement behind him. It was more a sensation of something moving, than any actual visible movement. But his ears caught a whisper of sound and his eyes, as he half-turned, saw a flicker of motion, as if a shadow had come to life. He saw a pale blur in the darkness at the right height to be a face, picked out from the deeper shadows by the starlight. It could have been a man's face or a woman's — or a ghost's.

Then as Max gathered himself to leap, something came down, crunching through the protection of his Panama. He grunted heavily, and fell forward to his hands and knees, balanced there a moment, then sprawled over side. ways. The night breeze, the scent of the shrubbery, the sound of the waves on the beach, all was lost in a blackness that overwhelmed him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ROUGH HANDS HANDLED Max. Someone stuck a lighted cigarette into his scalp. Someone else tried to suffocate him with some pungent, choking substance that made his sense of smell stand up and scream.

The sensations cut through the blanket of darkness and let other sensations follow. He became aware of a throbbing that threatened to shake his whole head off his neck. He heard a voice say:

"All right, that's enough, he's coming out of it."

The suffocating smell went away. He stopped wagging his head to avoid it and the throbbing eased just a little. He opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was Doc Haffner, the Vista Beach police surgeon, a tubby little man with his hair carefully plastered across a bald spot on the top of his skull. Then beyond the Doc he saw Nelson Hugo, the chief of police. As soon as Max London opened his eyes, Hugo thrust his face to within inches of the detective's and yapped at him:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, London, why did you kill him?"

Max closed his eyes again. He groaned and sagged backwards.

"Damn it, he's passed out again!" he heard Hugo swear. "Doc, give him some more smelling salts."

"He's had a bad blow on the head and there may be a concussion, maybe even a major one," he heard Doc Haffner's voice say. "Handle him easy or he may black out on you for hours more."

Max made a mental note to see that the Doc received a case of Scotch at Christmas, and went on reviewing all the impressions he had been able to gather in the few seconds his eyes were open.

He was in Jonothan Grigsby's library. He remembered stooping for the folded sheet of paper on the ground outside, and he remembered the blow that had put him out. He could even tell how long he'd been unconscious. The clock on the bookcase opposite him was registering 11:50. He'd gotten to the house about 11:15, and it had probably been seventeen or eighteen minutes past when he'd been slugged. He'd been out of commission for over half an hour.

Obviously the cops had come, found him and carried him inside.

And obviously the cops were there, led by Nellie Hugo himself, because this was a murder case.

He didn't have to deduce that. The evidence had been in full sight when he came to.

Jonothan Grigsby, sitting in a chair before his desk. Jonothan Grigsby, his arms hanging limply at his side, his greying head flopped down on the mahogany surface of the desk. Jonothan Grigsby, with a sizeable chunk of his head blasted away.

Jonothan Grigsby, Max London's client, about as dead as you could get.

"Hold his head up." That was Doc Haffner. "Let him sniff the ammonia again."

London tried to hold his breath, but the pungency of the spirits of ammonia got into his nose anyway. He wagged his head and made brushing motions with his hand.

"Go 'way," he mumbled. "Go 'way."

"He's coming out of it!" Hugo grated. "All right, stop trying to play 'possum,' London!"

Max opened his eyes and let the eyeballs roll. He stared at the chief of police blankly.

"Where am I?" he groaned, and followed it up with the time-honored, "What happened? Who hit me?"

"You know damn well where you are and you know damn well what happened!" Nelson Hugo snarled. "You came here to see Grigsby, you

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quarreled with him, he hit you with a cane and you lost your temper and blasted him. So why not come clean and admit it? We know the facts and you'll just make it easy for yourself if you talk now."

He waited. Max London stared at him stupidly.

"Hell, man!" Hugo grated. "He hit you. You went temporarily insane and shot him. It's only second degree murder. Make it easy for us and we'll make it easy for you. Make it hard and we'll call it first degree murder!"

Max blinked like a man coming out of hypnosis. The wily snake, Nelson Hugo, was trying to startle him into a confession while he was still dazed. Not even giving him time to think straight. But in doing so he was telling the detective a lot of things he wanted to know.

"Who's dead?" Max asked, spacing the words.

"Don't give me that line of garbage. Jonothan Grigsby's dead. You killed him. With your own gun."

Triumphantly the police chief held up Max London's own .32.

"One shot fired!" he gloated. "The bullet went into the plaster. We've dug it out and we'll run comparison tests. The gun is registered in your name. No need to deny it."

Max waited, keeping his face blank. If Grigsby had been murdered with his gun, that meant the killing had taken place after Max had been slugged. An obvious attempt to frame him. And one that might succeed, Nelson Hugo being police chief.

"Uhhh!" Max shuddered as if with pain, and cautiously reached up to touch his head. The skin had broken open and he could feel surgical stitches holding the edges together.

"I put three stitches in," Doc Haffner said with professional briskness. "Unless there's a fracture you'll be all right."

"He's all right now," Nelson Hugo sneered. "He doesn't fool me for a minute with this act."

"Who hit me?" Max mouthed each word slowly and carefully, as if he had to think about it.

"As if you didn't know?" Hugo jeered. From the unbloodied section of the desk he took a heavy, knobbed cane — Grigsby's. Near the end was a smear of blood.

"This hit you. Grigsby swung on you with it and you shot him. The facts are as plain as the bump on your head."

"Maybe to you," Max muttered. "But not me. Suppose *you* tell *me* what happened, since you know so much about it."

"All right, London," he said, "I'll tell you what we've got against you. You had a date with Grigsby tonight. He had ten thousand in cash here he was going to turn over to you to make some kind of deal for him.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You came here, came around the side of the house and in the open French windows. You and Grigsby talked. What happened I don't know, but knowing you I can figure you tried to hijack him into a bigger fee than he'd offered. Grigsby was a high-tension man, always keyed up, a lot on his mind, and he got sore when you showed your true colors.

"You probably threatened him and he swung on you with his cane. He connected and you went berserk. You hauled out your gun and shot him at point blank range. Blew away part of his skull."

"Then you knew you had to get out of here. You shoved the gun in your pocket and grabbed up the money. You went out the French windows again, but you were wobbling. That sock on the head was harder than you'd realized. You got as far as the lawn and you collapsed — right where we found you when we got here."

"You say you found the gun in my pocket," Max growled. "Where did you find the money?"

Nelson Hugo looked momentarily nonplussed.

"We didn't find it," he said. "Obviously you hid it before you passed out. We'll find it, though, in the morning. Must be out there in the shrubbery some place."

The detective pondered that bit of information. Up to that point the frame the police chief had outlined was watertight. But the missing ten thousand left a nice door open in it.

"How did you get here so quick?" he asked, giving the appearance of a half-dazed man trying to take it all in. "I wasn't out more than half an hour."

Hugo scowled. "Some man phoned in about eleven-thirty. Said he'd heard a shot here. We had a radio car here inside two minutes and as soon as they found the setup they called in. I was playing po — bridge with some friends out this way and headquarters notified me. I came right over. Luckily we got here in plenty of time before you could come to and make a getaway."

Max growled. "Any chowderhead should be able to see this is a frame. Somebody slugs me, kills Grigsby, takes the money, and scrams, phoning you on the way to make sure you get here in time to nab me. It makes a lot more sense that way. Just the fact the money is missing proves —"

"Frameup, frameup!" Nelson Hugo cut him off. "Every guy who gets caught screams frameup! We've got you, shamus, and you know it. You're going to be in a nice, tight cell from now on, London. I'll personally see to it you don't get bail. And as soon as we have the lab analyze the blood and hair on Grigsby's cane to make sure it's yours, we'll haul your tail into court. That reminds me. We'll want a sample of your blood and some of your hair. No objection to our taking them, have you?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Damned right I have!" Max snapped. "You don't touch me without my permission. Not until I'm legally booked."

"Just trying you out!" he chortled. "We already have the samples tucked away nice and neat. So we've got everything. Including a witness who can swear to your date with Grigsby, and that you knew all about the money."

He turned. "Martin," he called, "have Mrs. Grigsby brought in."

"Now wait a minute, Chief," Doc Haffner said. "She's had a severe shock. She should have a hypodermic and be allowed to sleep for twelve hours or so."

"As soon as she's confronted this man," Hugo told him. "She can stand that — surely she wants to see her husband's killer brought to book with the utmost speed. Bring her in and stand by with stimulants if necessary. Martin, give the Doc a hand. Jones and Farley, put a screen around the desk. No use making it too tough for the little lady."

Jones and Farley, both plainclothes, brought a leather screen from a corner and arranged it to cut off sight of the desk and the motionless figure slumped across it. A minute later Doc Haffner and the cop Martin escorted in Nola Grigsby. They held her elbows and she walked slowly, her eyes large and dazed.

Haffner held a chair and she settled into it. Her eyes flicked to the leather screen and away. Nelson Hugo faced her, wearing his most ingratiating smile.

"Mrs. Grigsby," he murmured, "you are being very brave and I sympathize with all my heart in your sorrow. I hope you will forgive me if I ask you a few questions again. As soon as you have answered, you will be able to rest with the consolation that at least there will be speedy justice for the man who killed your husband."

"It's all right," she said. Her voice had a sleepwalking quality. "I want to help. I want to help all I can."

"Good," Hugo purred. "Now please look at this man." He indicated Max London, and the wide dark eyes turned toward him.

"Have you ever seen him before?"

She nodded, her lips half parted. Her hands dropped to her lap and the V of her negligee opened wider. Max London's gaze stayed on her face and so did Hugo's, but he knew where the rest of them were looking.

"I saw him this morning. He was sunbathing on the beach."

"Did you know him?"

"My husband did. He said it was Max London, a private detective."

"And a short time later he called here?"

She nodded, slowly. "My husband had been in touch with him. He said

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he wanted to consult him about something. I didn't know what it was."

"Later in the evening your husband telephoned this man?"

"Yes." The soft, girlish voice came with the same slow, monotone enunciation. "I happened to be passing the library — this room — and heard my husband on the phone. He left a message for Mr. London to come here at eleven-thirty. I stepped in to ask him a question. He was counting some money — a lot of it. He put it in a desk drawer and told me he'd drawn $10,000 out of the bank for a business deal."

"Any special reason for him to mention that?"

"Yes. I scolded him. I said he'd come out here for a vacation, not business, and he said it was something that couldn't be put off."

"I see. Now you went to bed when, Mrs. Grigsby?"

"At ten. Jonothan was still up. He was very tired and snappish but he said he intended to wait up until he heard from Mr. London."

"And you didn't hear anything later? No commotion, no quarrel?"

A slow, side-to-side motion of the head. "I took a sleeping tablet. I've had trouble sleeping since the baby was born, and I take them every once in a while. I didn't know anything until — until — You knocked on my door and . . . and . . ."

Suddenly she covered her face in her hands.

"John!" she sobbed. "John! It's not true! It can't be!"

Her shoulders shook. Doc Haffner gave Nelson Hugo an 'I told you so' look and led her out. The chief of police seemed undisturbed.

"There you are, London!" he gloated. "Everything a jury will need. Fred Wharton will have you salted away without the jury ever leaving the box. So do you feel like saying anything now?"

Max growled, "Yes, I have something to say."

"Good. McCrory, get ready to take this down."

A bulky cop got a notebook from his pocket and wet the tip of a pencil with his tongue.

"I, Max London, private detective —" Max began, "— being of sound mind and normal intelligence, do hereby make the following statement for all men to know — Chief of Police Nelson Hugo is a damned fool," London finished.

One of the plainclothesmen chortled, but got his face straight before Hugo could whirl on him. The chief of police was livid.

"McCrory," he shrieked, "tear that up. As for you, London, you're going down to Headquarters now. You'll be booked in on a charge of first degree murder. Jones, Farley, take him out to my car."

The two plainclothesmen advanced on him. Max groaned and put his hand to his stomach.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Uhhhhh!" he retched. "I've got to toss my lunch." He pretended to gag. "I'm getting dizzy. I can't — can't —"

"Quick!" Doc Haffner barked. "Get him to the john. He has to vomit. May mean a skull fracture. Down the hall and handle him easy."

While Nelson Hugo stood undecided, Jones and Farley got hands under Max London's armpits and lifted him. Wobbling, he let them steer him out into the hall and down it a few yards to a door. Farley opened it and Max slipped inside and slammed the door shut before they could follow.

"Some things a man likes to do alone," he said through the door as he locked it. "I don't need any help to chuck my cookies."

He grinned to himself as he stepped across to the window. It was smaller than an average window but big enough, and it opened outward by turning a crank. It was already half open. Max wound it the rest of the way.

"Open up!" Farley, outside, urged. "Come on now, open this door!"

Max made a convincing retching sound. Then he flushed the toilet. Water ran, noisily. "Be — right out," he gasped loudly. "I'm kind of dizzy —"

He groaned and shoved over the towel hamper. It fell with a thud on the bathroom mat.

"Jeez, he passed out!" he heard Jones say. "We'll have to break in."

They began to throw shoulders against the door. Max climbed to the window sill, squeezed through and jumped. He came down with a thump that sent skyrockets of pain bursting through his head, and fell to his hands and knees. He was behind the clumps of shrubbery which surrounded the house, but ahead of him there was an easy passage beneath the lowest branches. He crawled forward. Behind him all attention was centered inside the house. No one seemed to be in the yard.

He paused as he came out of the shrubbery, not more than five feet from where he had been slugged. The moon was higher now, and the night brighter. Automatically he looked for the paper he had been trying to pick up. It wasn't there, of course, but he found something else. Almost under his hand was a cigarette stub, still not yet wet through from the dew. There was enough warmth still left in the tip to tell him that the cigarette had been dropped on the grass fairly recently, and probably burned for a few minutes before going out. At least it hadn't been snuffed out. He thrust it into his coat pocket, and keeping low, raced across the lawn. He reached the stone wall which separated the place from Tom Bates' property, hoisted himself over it and raced around to the door of Bates' home. He had the key out and the door open when he heard angry voices boiling out of the house he had just left. Then he was inside, and the door latched itself behind him.

Max dropped to the floor and lay there, in case anyone flashed a light in the windows.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Footsteps came pounding up and stopped. Someone rattled the door.

"Door's locked," a hoarse voice called. "And he couldn't have picked it, didn't have time enough. No windows are busted or open, so he must have kept on going. Keep after him. Shoot if you have to. Look in any outbuildings you find, and watch the beach — he may try for the water."

Footsteps and voices surged on past and moved away. In a couple of minutes there was silence, at least in the immediate vicinity.

Max breathed a silent prayer of thanks that Hugo hadn't asked the right questions of Mrs. Grigsby and learned that he was the official custodian of this place in Tom Bates' absence. Maybe she didn't know it — Grigsby might not have thought it worth mentioning.

Then he crawled into the next room, found the decanter of old brandy, uncorked it and tilted the bottle to his lips. After about five minutes he was feeling better. He got cautiously to his feet and felt his way into the bathroom. Still not turning on any lights, he found the aspirin bottle, swallowed a handful at a gulp, and went back to the living room. He settled himself on the sectional sofa.

His head felt full of loose rivets. If he held his head absolutely still he could think.

Who had sapped him? And why? What did anyone have to gain by knocking him out? Or had the sapper been someone trying to kill him? Probably not — a couple more smashes while he lay unconscious would have been all that was needed.

Presumably the same someone who had sapped Max had killed Grigsby. But why? Dunn certainly wouldn't have done it — he wasn't desperate enough yet. Nola Grigsby wouldn't kill her husband — at least, Max didn't think so, though you could never tell about women.

Of course, it wasn't impossible that someone had killed Grigsby just to frame Max London for the job. Far-fetched maybe, but not impossible. There were plenty of people who would consider such a deal not only good clean fun but a good night's work, too. Nelson Hugo, for one. But in that case the killer would certainly have put some or all of the missing ten thousand in Max's pants pockets and let him be found with the loot. Then Max wouldn't have had a chance. As it was, there were loose ends all over the place.

Max lifted his head gingerly, and found that the aspirin was doing good work. He could move with no worse result than a painful throb. He sat up and fished out of his pocket the stub of cigarette he had picked up after he jumped from Grigsby's bathroom.

A mini-flash which doubled as a key ring did duty for the lights he didn't care to turn on. In the tiny beam he studied the butt. On one side was an

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inch-long feather of browned paper, sure evidence the cigarette had lain in the grass burning for several minutes, and had probably been dropped within the last hour. Otherwise the paper would have been dew soaked.

On the side that had burned freely, the flame had obliterated all but the end of the brand name. Only three letters, printed in blue ink on the rice paper, remained.

"Hell," Max grunted to himself. "This is a personalized cigarette. Same kind of lettering as on those cigarettes Clara what's-her-name gave me for Christmas."

He turned the stub to get a better look. One of the letters was partly burned and hard to decipher.

-s-o-n. Who did he know whose name ended in -son? Only one name registered.

Max felt his way out to the hall and eased himself to the floor by the phone. Then he flipped the receiver into his palm and asked the operator for the number of the Beverly.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHEN HE HAD the number, Max used his mini-flash and dialed. "Miss Parson," he said. "Miss Patricia Parson." He waited again. "She just checked in today," he said, not patiently. "Look on the new arrival list."

Again he waited. They had found her name. They would ring. Sorry, Miss Parsons does not answer. Is there any message?

Max hung up. What time was it? Twelve twenty. Just about an hour since he had been slugged. It could easily take a stranger an hour to get from the beach downtown to the Beverly.

Had Patricia Parson slugged him and killed Grigsby? She had had a bitter quarrel with the inventor that afternoon. Beneath her icy surface she hid a lot of suppressed emotion. If she had blown her top — then if Max had almost surprised her as she was making a getaway and she had hidden in the bushes . . .

A big sedan had followed him part of the way from The Dunngeon to the beach. Could Tony Rienzo have been in that car? If Tony had phoned someone to come pick up his punks, he could have got outside fast enough to tail Max to Grigsby's. Tony had been wearing a dark blue suit. It would have been possible for him to sneak up behind Max, slug him, then kill Grigsby just to have Max charged with the murder. That glimmer of a face

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he had seen just before the night caved in — that had almost certainly been a man wearing a dark suit, with the collar turned up. Anybody wearing something light — a woman in a summer dress, for instance — would have shown more than a face. And Rienzo would kill his own mother-in-law if he had an angle figured out.

He thought of Meg Philips — and wondered if she and Dunn were at the nightclub. Especially Dunn. He picked up the phone and dialed again. This time he got an answer quickly. It was Meg Philips, and her voice sounded taut, frightened.

"Hello, Meg," he said. "Max London."

"Max, where are you? What happened here?" Her words came quickly. "I found Marsh and told him the date at Grigsby's was called off. Then we came back here and found one of the slot machines smashed, blood on the floor —"

"I entertained some customers while you were gone. Rienzo and two of his boys dropped in. We exchanged friendly greetings."

"You had a fight?" Meg's breath was indrawn. "You're all right, Max? Not in trouble?"

"Nothing I can't handle. But I couldn't wait any longer. I left Rienzo there with his thugs and went to Grigsby's, in case Dunn might go there."

"No, I stopped him. But Max, what about the money? Rienzo will be furious. Maybe he'll blame Marsh for what happened. He'll certainly come back looking for his money and if Marsh doesn't have it —"

"Baby, you'll have to stall him. The money has been temporarily mislaid."

She started to say something more, but Max hung up. He could have told her that Grigsby was dead and the promissory notes didn't stand a chance of being honored now. But Grigsby had commissioned him to pay off the notes. Max decided that the slug on the head he'd taken had earned him a commission, and Grigsby's death hadn't countermanded his orders. He was beginning to feel stubborn. He intended to find the money and pay off the notes and earn his fee. In any case he had to keep going. With Nellie Hugo on his tail now he had to find Grigsby's killer or become a stand-in for him. He might as well be paid for his efforts.

He dialed the Beverly again and asked for Patricia Parson. This time she answered. Had she just got in, maybe?

"Max London," Max said. "Something important has come up. I have to see you. Tonight."

"Tonight?" The word echoed uncertainty. "But it's twelve-thirty." I was just going —"

"I'll be there before one-fifteen." He hung up and stalked into Tom

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bates' bedroom and rummaged in the closet. Presently he brought out an expensive gabardine topcoat and a wide-brimmed Stetson, a modified Texan style Tom Bates affected. In these, Max jumped half a dozen income tax brackets in appearance.

He went upstairs through the darkened house to the attached garage at the rear. There were two cars in the garage — a Rolls-Royce sedan and a Jaguar. Bates had left him the keys for both of them. Max slid into the Jaguar and brought the motor to life. He began to back, and the wheels tripped a switch that rolled up the garage door. Max backed out on the bridge, and another switch rolled the door down again.

With only the parking lights on, he backed into the street and started forward, up the drive that wound to the top of the low cliffs and on to the more prosaic sections of the city.

There was no outcry behind him. Nobody came after him.

Max grinned and stepped on the throttle.

The Beverly turned out to be an oldish, but attractive apartment-hotel two blocks from the boulevard. He parked beside it and strode confidently around to the rear of the building, found a service entrance, and opened the door. Fire stairs went up from the back hall. Down a long corridor he could see the lighted lobby and the dozing clerk. He went up quietly, three flights, through a door into a hallway, and down the hall to 3H.

He knocked lightly, and at once the door opened on its guard chain.

"Mr. London?" Patricia Parson's voice asked.

"Max London," Max said. The chain rattled loose. The door opened. He stepped in and Patricia Parson closed it.

She was wearing a negligee, frilly and feminine but not fussy, and either had not removed her makeup or had reapplied it.

"I'm really not sure —" she began. "I mean, whatever it is, couldn't it wait until morning?"

"This couldn't," Max told her. He took her in his arms and kissed her, hard. For an incredulous moment in his arms she responded, her lips warm and eager. Then cerebration took over from instinct. She gasped, pulled herself back, and indignantly thrust him away.

It was no mere girlish push. Max reeled backward against the door and his head snapped back to meet the doorjamb painfully. He winced and reached for the back of a chair to steady himself. On second thought he lowered himself into the chair, and tenderly felt his head. He'd hit it just where Doc Haffner had put in the stitches, and it was bleeding again. His fingers came away red.

"You're hurt!" Patricia Parson said, suddenly contrite. "I'm sorry. Let me get you some water."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was back in a moment with a pan of warm water and some gauze. She removed the bloody Band-Aid and sponged until the bleeding stopped. "Heavens!" she said. "Stitches! At least I didn't do *that*."

"Didn't you?" Max asked. She looked at him blankly.

"What do you mean?"

"Skip it," he said. "I was slugged a couple of hours ago."

"And you think I did it?" A faint frown gathered on her fine features.

"I don't know who did it. Got a cigarette?"

"Of course." She brought him an engraved silver cigarette case. It was full of personalized cigarettes. *Patricia Parson* was printed on each in neat, distinctive blue script. Max put one in his pocket and lit a second. "Do you buy these on purpose or were they given to you?" he asked.

"Given to me." Her frown deepened. "John — Mr. Grigsby — gave me several cartons last Christmas. They're rather gratifying to the ego, I must admit, though I don't smoke much.

"Now —" the blonde woman settled herself on a chair opposite him and met his gaze with direct self-composure — "perhaps you'll tell me why you insisted on seeing me tonight. Just to kiss me? To ask for a cigarette?"

Max inhaled deeply. "Both. I came for a cigarette and I kissed you to see what you would do. I thought you might hit me. And you did, more or less."

"And did that prove something?"

"It proves you've got plenty of muscle. You can deliver a man-sized wallop."

She kept her eyes on his. "That's not surprising. I played a lot of tennis at college. Against men, mostly."

"Where did you go to college, anyway?"

"M.I.T."

"Massachusetts Institute of Technology?"

"That's what the initials usually stand for." There was asperity in her voice. "I took a degree in physics, with specialization in electronics. That's how I came to be associated with John. I helped build some apparatus for him and when I graduated he offered me a job. Then I developed a couple of inventions and he offered me a twenty-five percent interest in the firm for them."

"And ever since you've been married to your work."

"If I don't find men very interesting or attractive —" her voice was glacial — "what business is that of yours?"

"Maybe none," Max grinned. "You make yourself hard to like, Miss Parson. But I like you. What were you wearing this evening?"

"A dark brown dinner dress. Later, a cocoa-brown tweed topcoat. It

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hardly matters to me whether you like me or not, does it? And why should you want to know what I was wearing?"

"If I kiss you again," Max suggested, "it might make a difference. If you liked me, you would enjoy it more. And since you were wearing a dark dress and topcoat, I rather suspect it was you who slugged me earlier tonight."

"I didn't slug you. And I don't intend that you kiss me again. I'd appreciate it if you would either go, or come to the point of this visit. Apparently you actually do suspect me of slugging you, as you phrase it, though I can't imagine why."

"We'll come to why in a minute," Max told her. "Earlier today you came to see me. Then you changed your mind and wouldn't talk to me. I'd like to know what you actually came for."

"If I didn't tell you then, why should I tell you now? If that's all you have to say —"

"It's not all," Max interrupted, and did not try to sound polite. "Things have changed since then. You see, Grigsby has been murdered."

Her eyes widened. "M-murdered," she whispered. "You — If this is some kind of crude joke —"

"It's no joke. Certainly not to your partner or me. I was there when it happened. Slugged." Anger stirred in Max London's voice. "With me lying unconscious on the ground outside, somebody killed a client of mine."

"But — but who?"

"Who killed him?" London's square, battered features were bleak, his eyes ice-blue and cold. "What the hell do you think I'm trying to find out? If I knew who killed him I wouldn't be asking questions."

"Of course. I'm sorry." With a visible effort she composed herself. "Can you tell me how it happened?"

"He was in the library waiting for me." Max watched her face intently. "I was outside in the yard. Somebody knocked me out from behind, took my gun, and went in and blew his brains out. Then they framed all the evidence to point to me. Whoever did it also stole ten thousand dollars Grigsby had handy for me to settle some promissory notes with. That's all."

"I see." Her voice was steady now. "Those were the notes you spoke about this afternoon?"

"Yes. Now suppose you tell me what was worrying you. It may have a place in the picture."

She hesitated for a moment, reaching for a cigarette, lighting it slowly.

"Now let's get down to beating the rug. Did your visit to my office have any connection with Grigsby's murder?"

"I don't know." Her eyes met his. "You see, I don't know exactly why I came to your office. What I'm trying to say is that I was worried about

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

John. Dreadfully worried. Something was upsetting him. Sapping his energy, stealing his confidence, reducing him to a condition of apathy in which he no longer cared about anything. I was going to ask you to see if you could find out. I thought — you had such a reputation as a detective. . . . Then while I was waiting in your apartment I realized I was being a little absurd. In the first place, whatever was bothering John probably had its roots back in New York. In the second place, he might be just nervously exhausted. After all, he's been working eighteen hours a day for months trying to develop a color TV system better than RCA or any of his competitors has. It might be just cumulative strain."

"Combat fatigue. It happens."

"Of course, there was one other possibility though. John has been especially upset by the fact that a competitor, Franklin Jordan, of Jordan Electrical Industries, has been anticipating our work on several items. Jordan has been trying to buy us out for a long time — he wants control of the patents Grigsby Electronics owns. Then in the last six months Jordan has beat us into production with three different items we thought were our own secret developments. Basically, his were exactly like ours, though details differed. It might be just coincidence. But I think John believed that someone on our lab staff was disloyal and selling out to Jordan. Since every man of them has been with us for years, the very thought upset him."

"I follow you. Then this trip to California was to give him both a mental and physical change of climate."

"Yes, that was the idea."

"Was it your idea or his?"

"Mine, but he liked it. Said his twisted ankle was an ideal excuse to get away from the rat race for awhile."

Max rubbed a broad thumb along his chin, which was beginning to feel bristly. "And as soon as he got there, a gambler named Marshall Dunn demanded payment of promissory notes signed two years ago by Grigsby's first wife. Which certainly didn't help his peace of mind any."

"No, it wouldn't." Her eyes clouded. "He tried to put even the memory of Larrie out of his life. She hurt him so — And then, of course, business followed him out here too. That is, Franklin Jordan did. He phoned John several days ago and pretended he was just here on a vacation and wanted to have a chat. But he was still putting the pressure on John to sell. After talking to him John was more silent and withdrawn than I'd ever known him to be."

"This afternoon you said you'd had a real brawl with him. Was it over Jordan?"

She nodded. "Yes. Suddenly John said he'd made up his mind to sell. I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own twenty-five percent of the firm, but of course John has — had control. I couldn't prevent him if he decided to sell. I argued and pleaded. I pointed out that Jordan was offering two hundred thousand dollars, and the potential value of our patents was in the millions. You see, John and I were jointly working out something quite revolutionary," Patricia Parson told him. "It's a lens that will change any black-and-white television broadcast into color at the receiver. It's plastic and should only cost about twenty dollars. It can be fitted to any set in only a few minutes. The colors are still not sharply defined, but if I can improve it —"

"Hey!" Max looked at her with new respect. "Is that possible?"

She nodded. "The principal is rather involved. It depends on the fact that every color has a different wavelength and if you —"

"Never mind," Max London sighed. "Back to our rug beating. Neither of you would back down, so you walked out."

"That's it. I was very upset. I felt if he knew how upset I was he'd change his decision. Then it occurred to me that maybe Jordan was blackmailing John in some fashion, perhaps that was why he was so depressed. As soon as the idea came to me, I went to your office, thinking if it was that you might be able to prove it. You see, I did want help, but after I actually got there and had time to think it over, I realized that there was too little for you to work on. So I changed my mind about talking to you."

"I thought it was because you overheard my discussion with Nellie Hugo. And decided I wasn't the type."

"No." She shook her head. "It wasn't that. I — I admired you for throwing him out. After all, he *is* the chief of police and you —"

"Are just a private eye," Max finished. "I want to see this Frank Jordan now, tonight, before he learns of Grigsby's death. Any idea where he's staying?"

"Oh, yes. He's at the Tropical Hotel. I was talking to him earlier — about midnight. On the phone, that is."

"About Grigsby?"

"Yes. He was half drunk and he gave me a long harangue about why I should persuade John to sell to him. He promised to 'take care' of me." Her nose wrinkled in disgust. "It took me fifteen minutes to get him to hang up."

"He phoned you about midnight? And hung up about twelve fifteen?"

"Yes. That's why I wasn't asleep when you called."

"I called twice. Where were you the first time?"

"I was here." She looked at him steadily. "I didn't answer because I thought it was Jordan calling again. The second time I answered because I didn't want him calling all night. Only it was you."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mmm." Max chewed on this. "Where were you before midnight?"

"I was out driving." She said it without hesitation.

"In a brown dress and dark topcoat. By any chance were you driving near the beach?"

She nodded, her gaze challenging. "I started toward Jonothan's. Then when I was almost there I changed my mind. I decided to let him think about my arguments for another day."

"Okay," Max said. "Only, the fact you were here and talking to Jordan at midnight doesn't give you an alibi. Or him, either, as far as that goes. A good driver could just make it in from the beach after slogging me and killing Grigsby in time to be here before 12."

She did not answer that. Max picked up the fancy Stetson and rose. "Okay, that's all the questions for now. But I may think of more."

"Are you working to solve John's murder?" Patricia Parson asked as he moved toward the door.

"Not directly. Nobody's hired me to. I'm still working on the job he hired me for before he died."

This was partly true and partly a lie, of course. Nobody had hired him, but Max damned well had to solve the murder if he didn't want to be tagged for it himself. However, he didn't figure it was the right time to let Patricia Parson know he was probably, at that moment, the object of one of the most intensive manhunts in the city's history. Nellie Hugo would have every cop and detective in town on twenty-four hour duty until they had picked him up.

"Then I'll hire you," Patricia Parson said. "If you catch John's murderer, I'll pay you five thousand dollars."

Max studied her. She seemed to mean it. But then, even women who hadn't taken dramatics in college were sometimes good actresses.

"Maybe I'll prove you did it," he said finally.

"In that case —" her head was high and her look challenging — "I'll pay you ten thousand dollars. Goodnight — Max."

CHAPTER NINE

THE TROPICAL was a dozen blocks away. Max rolled the Jaguar along side streets, and parked a block behind the hotel, on a quiet, dark thoroughfare. From there he walked to a side entrance.

Max wanted to talk to Frank Jordan and check on the time he had actu-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ally phoned Patricia Parson. Then he was going to call on Dunn and beat a couple of rugs with him.

The Tropical was big and glittering. Even at two in the morning, there was plenty of life around it, especially on a Friday night. In his borrowed topcoat, with the wide-brimmed Stetson pulled down, Max looked like an oil millionaire, or maybe an obscure Western star who was coming back to life on TV.

Max walked in boldly. He attracted no attention as he crossed to the house phones, picked one up, and asked for Mr. Jordan.

He heard the operator ring, then her announcement: "Mr. Jordan does not answer."

"Is that Harry Jordan, in 311, you're ringing?" Max asked. "He said he thought he'd check in tonight but might be delayed."

"No, sir, I was ringing Mr. Franklin Jordan in 410," the girl told him. "I have no other Jordan listed. I'll transfer you to the front desk and —"

"Never mind." Max hung up.

He idled across to the elevators, waited until a group of women in evening dress and men in mess jackets surged into it from the direction of the cocktail room, and followed them in. He was the only one getting off at four. He stalled, lighting a cigarette, until the elevator went on up. Then he strode down the thickly carpeted corridor to the pale green door with the gilt numbers 410.

He tapped. There was nothing but silence inside. The transom was open. Max held his breath and listened. There was no sound inside to suggest a sleeper's breathing, no creaking of bed springs. Max waited a moment longer, then turned away. As he did so, another elevator stopped. A short, blond, moon-faced man in conventional tux, and slightly high, got out and came toward him. He was humming to himself happily, "*We're three little lambs who've lost our way, Baa! Baa! Baa!*"

He waited until Moon-Face reached him. "I've been waiting for you, Jordan!"

The drunk blinked.

"I know you?" he asked thickly.

"No, but you know Jonothan Grigsby," Max told him fast. "That's what I want to talk to you about."

"Jack Grigsby?" Jordan said, and belched. "Wha' 'bout him?"

"We can talk better in your room."

Slyly Jordan wagged his head. "Huh-uh," he said. "No bishness thish time o' night. I never talk bishness when I'm plashtered."

"Listen, Jordan," Max growled. "Maybe you don't like the idea, but we're going to talk just the same. Grigsby's been murdered."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Murdered?" he muttered, sobering fast. "Before he signed the papers? Oh no! You're jus' tryin' to queer our deal."

"Let's go inside and talk about it," Max snapped. "This place is too public."

"Yes, inshide," Jordan agreed. He fumbled his key into the lock, pushed the door open and wobbled in. Max followed, closing the door while Jordan found a light.

"Now!" Jordan collapsed into an overstuffed chair like a punctured punching bag, his Scotch-red face sagging. "Tell me you're kiddin'," he pleaded. "Grigsby can't be dead. Why, I jus' saw him las' week in N'York, an' talked to him ona phone jus' this afternoon. So you shee," he concluded triumphantly, "he can't be dead!"

"If you can convince him of that you'll be doing him a big favor," Max said. "What did you talk to him about this afternoon?"

"Look," Jordan said, his speech clearing. "Lemme throw some cold water on m' face. 'M in no condition to talk, ri' now."

He made it into the bathroom, more or less on a straight line. Max heard the cold water running hard and Jordan grunting and gasping as he sloshed it onto his face.

He came out in a couple of minutes, mopping his face with an oversize towel. Water spots stained the lapels of his dinner jacket.

"All right," he puffed, settling down on the bed. "Now tell me about it. How did poor old Jack Grigsby get killed?"

"Somebody blew his brains out," Max said brutally. "You were going to tell me what you talked to him about on the phone this afternoon."

Jordan blinked. "About me buying Grigsby Electronics, of course. It's th' logical thing to do."

"And you haven't seen him in person since you got here?" Max asked.

"Me?" Jordan protested. "Why sh'd I go alla way out to that beach place of his? What wasa phone invented for? Anyway, his wife Nola don't like me."

"If Grigsby was going to sell to you, why did you have to call Miss Parson and try to get her to persuade Grigsby?" Max flipped at him.

"The deal was all set," he said, "if. I mean, Grigsby said he'd think about, which meant he'd do it, only he had to talk to Lemonade some more about it."

"Lemonade?"

"Tha's my name for her — tall, cold and sour. Pat Parson. She's a junior partner. Grigsby likes — liked her. She's a smart dame." Jordan tapped his forehead. "She's got it here instead of just there, like most women have. So I wanted her to agree. I wanted her working with me, not against me."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And what time did you phone Pat — Miss Parson?"

The short, red-faced man opened his mouth and looked at the ceiling. "Little after eleven-thirty. She wasn' in."

"You called a little after eleven-thirty and she wasn't in?"

"She didn' answer. So I left a message with th' operator to have her call me when she comes in. So I had 'nother drink — 'nother daiquiri. So she didn't call. So I called back. This time she was in. We talked. But she wouldn' be friendly."

He shook his head sadly.

"She wasn' friendly at all. I just don't know why she don't like me."

Max thumbed his jaw. The phone rang. Jordan groaned and sat up, reached for the handset on the table beside his bed.

"Yes?" he said. "Jordan speaking. . . . Huh? . . . Why, yes . . . he's here." He looked at Max, perplexed. "For you," he said.

Max hid his surprise. "Max London," he said into the mouthpiece.

"For Crissake, get out of there!" Cal McVey's voice rasped at him. "Don't you know the alarm's out for you? A certain party is sorer than a boil on a daschund's stomach. A bellboy phoned in that you'd gone into 410, the Tropical, and there's a squad on the way. Probably in the elevators now. I'm phoning from a booth. 'Bye."

"Thanks, Joe," Max said, but Cal had already hung up. Max was putting down the receiver when the operator cut in.

"Beg pardon, but I'm holding another call for 410."

"Hello, Frank!" It was a woman's voice, hurried and furtive, and Max found a familiar echo in the tone. "This is Nola. John's been killed! The house is full of police and this is the first chance I've had to phone. Don't tell anyone you were out here! The police say that detective, you know, the one who —" The hurrying, breathless voice broke off. "Frank?" it said, suspiciously. "This is Frank, isn't it?"

Max hung up gently. "My assistant down in the lobby," he told Jordan, "Another angle has come up. I'll be in touch with you."

CHAPTER TEN

MIRACULOUSLY, HE GOT OUT before they could raise a general alarm, slipped into the Jaguar and headed toward the beach. It purred like an electric clock, anxious to cut loose, but he held it severely down to legal limits. This was no night to be picked up for speeding.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He let his reflexes drive and chewed on the new bones of fact he'd picked up from Jordan. Pat Parson hadn't been at the Beverly at eleven thirty. She'd been there at twelve. That gave her time to get from the beach to the hotel — if she had been the one who slugged Max and killed Grigsby.

The cigarette Max had found, which was almost certainly one of Parson's personalized cigarettes, proved she had been there. If she was lying about not having gone to Grigsby's, she was top man on the suspect pole again.

On the other hand, when it came to lying, what were Nola Grigsby and the little lost sheep, Jordan, covering up? Obviously Jordan had been out to see Nola, probably that day, and equally obviously she didn't want it known. Jordan had said she didn't like him, but the way they talked on the phone they had known each other a long time. Suppose they had killed Grigsby, acting in concert?

It was plain there was something between Nola and Jordan. Pat Parson had said that Jordan was beating Grigsby Electronics to the punch on certain items. Suppose the spy had actually been Nola, with the big violet eyes and the baby voice — Nola, who had been cheating on her husband in a business way as badly as the late and unlamented Larraine had cheated on him in bed.

And if Grigsby had somehow got hold of proof, Nola and Jordan might have decided to kill him before he blew the lid off. . . .

Suppose Nola had warned Jordan that her husband had hired a private detective? They would naturally suppose it was to check up on them. If Jordan had seen Max arrive at Grigsby's rented home, he could easily have followed, done the slugging, killed Grigsby, fixed up the frame, and hurried back to his hotel, phoning the police on the way.

Jordan had phoned Patricia Parson at about midnight, to invite her over to the Tropical for a drink. But he also claimed he had phoned her at eleven thirty. If Jordan had been at the Tropical at eleven thirty, he couldn't have killed Grigsby. The murder and frameup couldn't have been completed much before half past eleven. If Jordan wasn't lying, he was in the clear. There was an easy way to find out.

Max stopped at an all night gas station, told the sleepy attendant to fill the tank, and strode in to the pay phone. He called the Beverly, and after a wait, got Patricia Parson.

"Hello," she said, her voice languorous with sleep. "What is it?"

"Pat. Max London."

"You again?" She did not sound displeased. "Is this —" time out for a yawn — "social or business?"

"Business. You told me Jordan phoned you. Just before midnight."

"Or maybe a minute or two after. Why?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"When you got in, was there a message for you?"

"Message? . . . Oh yes, a record of a phone call. Jordan had called earlier and wanted me to call back. I'll get it." Her voice faded away, came back in a moment. "What do you want to know, Max?"

"What time it was received and what it said."

"Time? Oh yes, it's right here. 'Time received: 11:33 p.m. Message: Please phone Mr. Jordan at the Tropical Hotel and have him paged in the cocktail room.'"

"Thanks. Police bothered you yet?"

"Should they have?"

"They will. As soon as they get Jordan's story straightened out. I left him just before they got there."

"What should I tell them?"

"The truth. That I busted in on you and that you were indignant about it. I told you about the murder but naturally you didn't know I was wanted for it. Better not tell them you hired me to solve it, though. It might annoy them. They have a silly idea solving murders is their job." He hung up and walked out of the booth.

Max took out the cigarette he'd palmed earlier in Pat's apartment. Then he took from the envelope where he had put it for safekeeping the stub he had found on Grigsby's lawn. The blue printing on them both seemed identical. But now, in a good light, he couldn't be certain about the first visible letter on the burned stub. It might be an *s* or an *e*. He couldn't think of anyone in connection with Grigsby whose name ended *-eon*.

Max stepped into the men's room and into a stall, from which he took several sheets of tissue. Holding these against the mirror, he wrote a brief message on them with his ballpoint pen — a forty-nine cent special. He rolled the cigarettes inside the tissue, put the cylinders into the envelope, plastered it with the stamps he always carried in his wallet, scribbled Nat French's name and address under the stamps, dropped the envelope in his pocket, and strode out. The kid was waiting for him.

Max paid him and wheeled the Jaguar away from there, hoping the sleepy kid hadn't heard any of the earlier broadcasts about him. He stopped presently to drop the envelope to Nat in a collection box, then gave the car the reins. In five minutes he was rolling northward along the coast, and in fifteen he was turning up the drive to The Dunngeon.

The dingy club was dark except for a beam of light from a side window. There were two cars parked outside — the Packard and the old Buick.

Max cut the motor and climbed out. The moon was low, but there was enough light to show up the front of the building and the unlit neon sign. Max smacked his fist into the palm of his hand. The Dunngeon! *-e-o-n!*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The stub he had found had come from here. He'd smoked a cigarette Meg had given him, that afternoon, without bothering to read the printing on it, but he remembered the blue letters. So it was Dunn after all.

Max stepped in through the unlocked door and fumbled for the light switch. The lights came up and Max gave an unprintable exclamation.

The interior of the joint was a wreck. Tables lay on their sides. The service bar had been pushed over and a litter of broken bottles lay in puddles of alcohol over the dance floor. A couple of bottles had been thrown through against the wall, and one had been hurled through the plate glass mirror.

Max was staring at the mess when from outside he heard a car motor roar to life. Wheels spun gravel and somebody went away from there in a fair imitation of a jet taking off.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TAILLIGHT of the blue Packard was turning at the bottom of the drive as Max threw the Jaguar into gear. He corkscrewed down the drive and when he made the turn the convertible was only four or five hundred yards ahead. It was going north and the coastal highway was deserted.

Max heavy-footed the gas pedal. The Jaguar seemed to shake itself as the engine gulped in high-test through twin carburetors. With no apparent intermediate transition the car went from fifteen to seventy.

The car Max was chasing held its distance.

Max eased up for a curve. When he floorboarded the throttle again the Packard had gained.

The four lane concrete straightened out now. Max kept the pedal grimly down. At a hundred and ten he had pulled up to the Packard's tail and was turning out to pass it.

As he came opposite the blue car he had time to see a figure in white crouched behind the wheel. Then he shot past as the other car slowed abruptly, brakes screaming, front end swerving crazily.

Max fought the Jaguar to a stop. By the time he'd lost his speed the convertible was an eighth of a mile behind him and swinging to make a turn.

Instead of taking the time to turn, Max reversed and backed.

The driver of the convertible misjudged the width of the road and had to back. Max, craning backwards and holding the wheel with one hand, roared across the nose of the Packard and stopped. Trapped sideways

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the road the blue convertible stopped too. The driver stayed inside.

Max turned the ignition key and leaped out, his hand in his pocket on a gun that wasn't there. He wrenched open the door of the Packard.

Meg Philips, her eyes dilated, stared at him.

"Max," she whispered, "I thought — I thought —"

Then she slumped over and almost fell into the road.

He propped her up, slid her across the wide leather seat, her head lolling, her eyes shut. Then he got in beside her, backed and straightened the car out. Next he pulled the Jaguar to the side of the road in front of the Packard and walked back.

Meg was still unconscious. Max slid in beside her.

She was wearing the same white dress she'd worn earlier in the evening, with a light, cream-colored topcoat over it. The dress was cut low and the coat was unbuttoned.

He slapped her, very lightly. At first her head merely rolled at the impact of his palm. Then she gave a wordless murmur and opened her eyes. For a moment she simply stared at Max London in wordless terror. Then recognition returned and she relaxed.

"Oh, Max," she whimpered. "Max. Thank God it's you. I thought — thought it was — Rienzo or his men coming back."

"Rienzo wrecked the joint?" Max asked. "When? And where is Dunn?"

Slowly she shook her head from side to side, her breathing slowing to a shallow gasping.

"I don't know."

"Don't know if Rienzo smashed the place up or where Dunn is?"

"Neither," she said. "Don't be rough with me, Max. Please. I've been — so scared. Let me have a moment to pull myself together. It's been — a bad night."

She was trembling like a leaf.

"Here's a cigarette." He lit one and put it between her lips. She inhaled, sighed.

"Aaaah," she said. "Better." She opened her eyes. "I guess I can talk now without getting hysterical. I was running away," she said then, looking straight ahead. "I'd just put one bag in the back and gone back for another when you drove up. I heard a car stop and somebody get out. I ducked around behind the club. I saw you go in, but it was so dark I couldn't recognize you, especially in that hat and coat. I thought it was somebody Rienzo had sent to get me. I crept around the other side of the club and reached my car. I tried to get away so fast you couldn't follow."

Max nodded. "What were you running away from?"

"What was I running from?" She looked at him. "I was just running,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max. I mean, I was scared silly. Someone had wrecked the club, and I didn't know who or why, and whoever it was might be coming back to — to wreck me."

"Rienzo, you mean. Maybe," Max agreed. "But give me the whole story."

"How do you mean, the whole story?"

"I mean after you left me at the club and went to look for your boy friend."

"I took the car and went to Donovan's. It's a night club down the coast, quite far. That's the place Marsh hadn't been yet when I phoned. I thought I might catch him there."

"Who's Donovan?"

"He owns a beer and liquor distributing company. He helped Marsh get started originally. Marsh owed him for two months' supplies. He's been so patient I guessed Marsh might try to touch him for more."

"Did he?"

"Yes. He made Donovan angry. Donovan told him he'd have to have what was owed him or he'd foreclose. Marsh got angry too. I caught him just as he was coming out after arguing with Donovan. I told him the meeting with Grigsby was off and you were at the club."

"And you both went back?"

"Yes. He went in his Buick and I followed him."

"You met him outside this Donovan's? Not inside?"

"Outside."

"Okay. Go on."

"Well, we got back to The Dunngeon. The lights were on. We went in. You weren't there. Of course, I'd known you weren't when I saw your car gone."

"Of course."

"But we got inside and found signs of a fight in the gambling room. A slot machine knocked over and broken. Blood on the floor — quite a lot of it."

"Lefty and Righty put it there," Max said with satisfaction.

"Lefty and Righty?"

"A pair of twins, Rienzo's bodyguard. I altered their resemblance a little."

"I see." She caught her breath. "We couldn't imagine — But Marsh did guess that Rienzo had been there and might have hurt you."

"Nice of him to worry about me."

"Anyway, Marsh was petrified. He could hardly talk straight, he was so worried. Rienzo is nobody to have mad at you, you know."

"I suppose not. He's mad at me, though."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're different," Meg said simply. "Marsh is a coward. Then he gets angry because he's afraid and sometimes he does things."

"Does things?"

"I mean for instance, sometimes he starts a fight with someone he's scared to death of, and wins."

"I see. Another cigarette?"

"Thanks." She waited while he lighted it, then took it gratefully. "Anyway, Marsh wanted to go keep the date with Grigsby in spite of your saying it was called off. It still wasn't half past eleven and he could have got there only a little late. I told him no, that you'd said positively the date was off and you were handling it.

"So he got out a bottle and started drinking. That's what he did when he got nervous."

"Did?"

"Ever since I've known him." She looked puzzled.

"Okay, keep going."

"I had a drink too, but only one. I was nervous. I kept hoping you'd come back. Then you telephoned. When you said the money had been mislaid or something, I was frantic. Marsh was frantic too. He was worried for fear Rienzo might come back any minute and demand his money.

"He was getting pretty drunk. So I said I'd try to find you and tell you he would settle for sixty-five hundred in cash if he could have it immediately. I took my car and started downtown to your apartment. I looked it up in the book. Of course, I tried to phone you and you weren't in. But I thought maybe you'd be going there. And I hoped you'd be able to raise the money somewhere if you knew it was a matter of life and death."

"So you got to my apartment. I wasn't there. Then what?"

"I parked outside and waited in the car with the radio on. After a few minutes there was a news bulletin. It said Grigsby had been killed and you were wanted for the murder and all police had orders to arrest you and to shoot to kill if necessary. Then it gave your description. When I heard that I knew you probably wouldn't be coming back to your apartment. So I came back here to tell Marsh he probably wouldn't ever get the money from Grigsby. I couldn't imagine what he'd do. Maybe just leave, walk out on the place and go someplace else with the cash he had in his pockets.

"Then when I got to the club, his car was still out front so I thought everything was all right. But when I walked in and saw the mess I was terrified. I called his name and he didn't answer, and I saw that the office and our bedroom were wrecked too. Then I couldn't think of anything except to get away. I started packing as fast as I could."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You looked around for Dunn? You searched the building for him? Did you look outside?"

"I looked in our room and the office and he wasn't there. I didn't think to look outside. I just wanted to get away in case they were coming back."

"I see." Max dragged in deeply and exhaled. "Where were you going? What were your plans?"

"I didn't have any. Not exactly plans. I was going to look up a former girl friend and ask her to put me up for the night. Then I don't know. I think I figured I'd phone Rienzo in the morning that I was trying to raise the money and ask him to go easy on Marsh."

"Mmm." Max used his tongue to roll his cigarette along his lips. "I think we'd better go back and look The Dunngeon over some more."

"All right," she said. "I don't mind going back — if you're with me."

"You turn around and I'll follow you."

They went back to The Dunngeon at an easy forty, with the Packard in the lead. Meg pulled up in the parking area a little ways from the Buick that still stood there. She waited until Max slid the Jaguar in beside her before she got out.

She rested her hand on Max London's arm as they went into the wrecked interior, ugly and depressing in its low-key lighting.

Max prowled around the edges of the dining room, avoiding the puddles of liquor on the floor. He moved into the gambling room, where the lights were better, and examined the smashed roulette wheel and the overturned slot machines. Then he went into the office.

"Where are the Larraine Grigsby notes?" he asked, jerking his head at the empty safe.

"Why — I don't know." Meg Philips frowned. She looked into the safe, and on the floor. "They're gone. Either Marshall hid them, or Rienzo made him open the safe and took them."

"Dunn get his tan under that thing?" Max looked at the broken sun lamp.

"Yes. He didn't get outdoors much. I used it too. It's nice in bad weather."

Beyond the office was a door. It led into a bathroom. Beyond the bathroom was the bedroom. Max walked in and found a light already on, the light he had originally seen through a side window when he approached the place a half hour earlier. Except for clothes strewn around, most of them feminine, the place apparently hadn't been touched.

"You do this?" he asked, gesturing.

"Yes. I was packing fast. There's the bag I was coming back for when you drove up and scared me away."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The bag lay on an unmade bed, a striped piece of airplane luggage, closed and locked. Max London picked it up.

"You'll probably need it," he said. He carried it out and set it down near the door.

"The kitchen," he said. "This place must have a kitchen."

"Yes, of course. The door's over here."

She showed him a door, half screened by some artificial potted palms. Max shoved it open, went through, and fumbled for the wall switch. Even before he found it, he smelled for the second time that night the distinctive, sickly sweet smell of fresh blood.

Then his fingers clicked the switch, the lights leaped on, and Meg Philips, swaying against him, gave a choked-off scream.

They had found Marshall Dunn.

He lay on his side on the linoleum floor. His face was a bloody pulp. He was in his shirt sleeves and over his arms and chest the thin cotton had been ripped away. The flesh beneath it was torn in an ugly, criss-cross pattern of raw strips, and he was soaked in blood from the waist up.

Max bent over for a moment, studying him. Then he straightened. "He's been chain-whipped, gangster fashion," he said harshly. "Then, maybe because he wasn't dying fast enough, he was shot."

CHAPTER TWELVE

MAX LONDON TURNED away from the window that looked toward Jonothan Grigsby's residence. Across the darkened living room he could see Meg only because her white dress and coat made a pale blur in the dimness.

"Please, M-Max." Her teeth were chattering. "M-may I have a drink now? I n-n-need one."

Max found the cellarette, picked out a bottle at random. He filled two glasses generously. It turned out to be Scotch. Meg sipped quickly and leaned back in the chair of moulded plywood.

"Is it all right, Max?" she asked. "Nobody followed us?"

"Everything seems quiet," he said. "I guess nobody was keeping an eye on this place. They figure me to be a long ways away by now."

"Where are we?"

"House of a friend of mine. Next door to where Grigsby was killed."

"Next door?" she exclaimed. "But — No, I won't ask any questions. Just as long as we're safe for tonight, at least."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max listened a moment longer. If they had been spotted, there should be some indication of it by now. There was none.

He had come back to Tom Bates' beach house as the safest place he could think of. As long as the police didn't know of his connection with Bates' house, it made an ideal hideout.

The silence continued. Max relaxed.

"Max," Meg asked in the darkness. "Why didn't you phone the police about Marsh? Shouldn't they know as soon as possible? In case they can connect Rienzo with it."

"I'll do it now. My idea was to get away from there, just in case the cops had another of those anonymous tips."

He went to the hall phone, dialed.

"The Dunngeon is just over the line in Montdale," he said from the hall. "That means the Montdale boys will investigate, as it's out of Vista Beach jurisdiction."

He got his number, gave the information fast to a sleepy desk sergeant, and hung up. "You might ask Tony Rienzo about it," he said, just before he cradled the receiver.

"They'll send a squad," he s[illegible]e returned and picked up his drink and gave them both refills. "But nothing will happen. For one thing the Hi-Spot is in Beach jurisdiction. They'll have to get Nellie Hugo's cooperation. He'll give it — to the extent of a superficial inquiry. Then he'll give Rienzo a clean bill. In any case you can be damn sure Rienzo has been seen in public with plenty of witnesses ever since he gave his boys their orders."

"It was Rienzo, wasn't it, Max?" Meg asked, curling one leg beneath her. "It couldn't have been anyone else?"

"I don't see how. Chain-whipping is a sweet new refinement originated down on the gulf coast and only just introduced here. So far it's exclusively a gangster monopoly."

"Poor Marsh," she whispered. "I'm glad he was so drunk. He — couldn't have felt too much pain. I wonder if he made them mad or if they went there intending to kill him."

"On purpose, probably. Now suppose you tell me the truth."

"The truth? About what, Max?"

"You didn't find Dunn at all when you went to look for him, did you?" Max said quietly. "So you went back to the club and waited, and he finally showed up, probably around ten to twelve."

He could barely see her shake her head.

"I've told you the truth, Max," she answered. "I found Marsh about half an hour after I left you, coming out of Donovan's. We talked for five minutes, then he and I drove back to the club and waited there together."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And you were together until I telephoned?"

"Yes. What are you thinking? That Marsh came out here to the beach and killed Grigsby and took the money?"

"I think he did."

"But he was at the club with me. Unless," she added reluctantly, "he came out here before he went to Donovan's."

"No. Grigsby was killed after eleven fifteen."

"Then it couldn't have been Marsh. It was about eleven when I found him."

"Will Donovan be able to corroborate that he was there?"

"Of course. He spoke to Donovan himself. They had an argument."

"OK," Max said. "Time to punch the clock." He stood up, aching all over now. "We'll beat the rug some more tomorrow. This way, baby. Guest suite. Your own bath, everything. Help yourself to anything you can find."

"No lights," he cautioned as he left her. "A match, maybe, if the shades are down."

"I understand. Goodnight, Max."

" 'Night." He padded back to the master suite, and was almost asleep when the door opened and soft footsteps came uncertainly toward him.

"I can't sleep, Max. Things keep going around and around in my head. I keep thinking of Marsh and how he — how he lay there on the floor with his face — his face . . ."

She broke off as her voice threatened to rise. When she spoke again, she had it under control.

"Max," she whispered. "Would you let me sleep in here? I mean, would it bother you? It's not —" her laugh was shaky — "it's not that I'm trying to throw myself at you. But I'm scared. I have a feeling that I'd be screaming if I spent ten minutes more alone."

Max sighed. "All right, baby. Climb in. If it'll help."

She slipped into the big bed and stretched out beside him, her body touching his, her skin warm, her flesh soft. She seemed to be wearing a dash of *Nuit* and nothing else.

"I'm raw," she whispered. "Do you mind? I couldn't find anything to put on, in the dark. And we left my bag in my car."

"I don't mind," Max grunted sleepily.

"Thank you, Max," she whispered. "This feels so good. I mean I feel safe now. It's just having another human being close to you, someone you know is your friend, alive, warm, breathing."

"Yeah," Max yawned.

She crept closer to him.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Send me away if I'm annoying you."

"You're not annoying me."

"I'll go to sleep now. I know I will."

Max let that go. He concentrated on sleep, but felt it slipping away from him. Suddenly Meg, snuggling against him, giggled.

"Max, I thought you were sleepy!"

"I am," Max groaned.

"You're not acting sleepy. Goodness!"

"Pure reflex," Max sighed. "Pay no attention."

"Pay no attention? You think I can just lie here and pretend I don't notice that — Max, *really!*"

Sleep had lost the round by a wide margin.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WEARING ONLY HIS SHORTS, Max stretched out on the sofa. A cup of coffee laced with brandy sat on the floor. He scooped it up and emptied it. Then he picked up the sheet of typewriter paper from the rug and read it again.

Max, it said, *please don't be angry with me, but I'm running away. From everything. I can't bear to face lots more questions by the police, and I'm afraid of Rienzo. You have your own problems and I'd just be a nuisance and in the way. Maybe I'll go to Mexico. Wherever it is, I'll get in touch with you. I do want to see you again. Last night was wonderful. Meg.*

She'd been gone when he got up. He'd slept until one. She could have pulled out at any time during the morning. He'd found the note in the portable in the guest suite. He'd also found the pictures of Selma Carle, which he'd developed the previous day and left hanging in the bathroom. Obviously Meg had seen them. Maybe they'd made her jealous. Besides the pictures, he'd come across Selma's handbag, which she had forgotten the day before. But Meg had left nothing.

He didn't blame her for running away. She had plenty to be scared of. He filled the cup from the full pot of coffee and brandy on the floor and sipped it, considering the situation. In the past two hours he had put through long distance phone calls to New York, Boston and Reno, as well as a call to Patricia Parson at her hotel. He was waiting for results from the first three.

Max glanced out the big picture window that faced the beach. Nola Grigsby, in a blue bathing suit, holding her small son's hand, was walking

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the water's edge. She was furtively peering at Tom Bates' house as she strolled. Max could almost read her mind. She was wondering if he was there or not.

Why hadn't she sent Nellie Hugo's men after him, since she obviously knew he'd been staying there? If she thought he'd killed her husband she'd certainly want him caught. Or if she had killed Grigsby, she'd wanted Max to take the rap. The only answer Max could come up with was that she hadn't killed her husband, and somehow knew Max hadn't, and for that reason was reluctant to see him picked up.

He went to the phone and dialed Nat French. "Got the dope on that cigarette stub for me?" he asked when Nat answered.

"Hello, fugitive," the dry voice greeted him. "Is that your new personal stationery?"

"It's too good for most of my correspondents. Well?"

"The letters on the stub are s-o-n. The stub is an identical match for the unsmoked cigarette you included."

"Hell! You can't be wrong?"

"Sure. Back in 1949 I thought —"

"Okay, okay. So it's Parson's cigarette?"

"Nobody else's. However — No lipstick. What kind of female is she?"

"I hope to find out. Thanks, Nat."

Max hung up. Well, the cigarette didn't mean Dunn couldn't have been there too. A whole Elk's convention could have marched past without him knowing it. He waited a moment, then picked up the phone again. This time he dialed the Tropical and asked for Frank Jordan. In a moment the fat little man's high-pitched voice answered.

"Hello, Jordan, Max London speaking," Max growled.

"What do you want?" Jordan's tone became guarded.

"What did you tell the police last night?"

"Just exactly what happened. However, I don't think I have to answer your questions."

"Suit yourself. Then I'm to assume you don't want to see Grigsby's killer caught?"

"Of course I do! But the police say you killed him."

"I know better and so do you," Max said flatly but untruthfully. "I'm gathering up the loose ends now. I thought that, since you were such a close friend of Grigsby — and Mrs. Grisgsby," he added, underlining the words, "you might want to retain me to catch the killer. I won't charge much. Say five thousand."

"Ridiculous! The police are quite competent to handle the affair. For

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your sake I hope you didn't kill Jonothan. However, that's for the police to decide."

He hung up. Max cradled the phone. Jordan was either guilty as hell or innocent as an angel. He couldn't figure which.

The hall clock said it was late and getting later. Max showered and shaved and put on a pair of Tom Bates' gabardine slacks and a thirty dollar sport shirt. Bates' shoes didn't fit him but he found a pair of leather-thonged Mexican sandals that did.

He went to the guest suite and gathered up the films and prints in the bathroom. The prints Pete would need for the article he put aside, and tucked the rest into an envelope. He had promised Selma Carle she could have them, though she would probably burn them.

Max put away the developing equipment. Selma's handbag was on the bureau, where Selma had left it when she had changed the day before. Max wondered if she had really forgotten it or if it had been an excuse to come back. Inside it was her driver's license, the eighty dollars Max had given her, some change, a lipstick, a vanity, and a picture of a tall youth with a crew cut. Roger, no doubt.

Max left the bag on the table by the telephone and was mixing Daiquiris when the buzzer sounded. It was Pat Parson at the street door. He let her in and slid the door shut.

He led Patricia Parson into the big front room and poured the Daiquiris. She leaned back in a modernistic chair — it looked like something a couple of kids had whipped up out of old plumbing, but it was amazingly comfortable — and smiled at him.

"You didn't really kill John, did you?" she asked.

"Do you think I did?"

"No." She shook her head. "I don't suppose I'd be here if I did. But the papers this morning made it sound as though you'd practically escaped on the way to the gas chamber."

"That's right. Did the police bother you much?"

"Not too much. They came just after you phoned. Franklin Jordan told them you'd been talking to me."

"What did you tell them?"

"Just that you came and told me Jonothan Grigsby had been killed and you were trying to find the murderer. The detective in charge — I think his name was Belmont. . . ."

"Bill Belmont. He's okay."

"Yes. He was very nice. He kept my name from the reporters. They don't know I was Jonothan's partner and they haven't bothered me."

"Has Frank Jordan been in touch with you?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He phoned this morning. Started right out by telling me that John had agreed to sell out to him and he hoped that now he and I could work together." She made a face. "I hung up on him." She sipped her drink, put it down, leaned forward. "Max," she said, "who did kill John?"

Max drained his glass. "I'm not sure yet."

She shook her head. "I've thought and thought and I can't see what a single soul stood to gain by Jonothan's death. Everybody loses. Without him the firm will probably have to be sold. So I lose. Nola loses. Frank Jordan may gain something if he buys it, but John had already practically decided to sell."

"Murderers aren't always logical," Max said, looking at her. "Sometimes they kill just because they're angry."

She sat very still. "Do you mean me?"

"You. I'm still not sure you didn't do it."

"I'm not worried, Max."

"Not even that I know you were out here last night about the time I was slugged?"

She seemed surprised. "No, Max. That's wrong. Why do you think I was?"

"Your cigarettes. I found a stub of a *Patricia Parson* cigarette on the grass outside Grigsby's library window. It hadn't been there long."

"One of my cigarettes?" She leaned back and smiled at him. "No, I'm not worried, Max. As a scientist I can think of at least two plausible ways it could have got there without my dropping it. First," Patricia Parson told him, "I left the house in a hurry. I had a couple of cartons of those cigarettes and I left several packs behind me. I may even have left an open pack in John's library. So —"

"I'm way ahead of you," Max sighed. "Grigsby may have been walking around outside, smoking one, and dropped it."

"Or when the police came, one of them may have picked up the pack," Pat suggested. "Or just taken one cigarette. And since they were undoubtedly outside, searching that particular area —"

Max looked disgusted with himself.

"It's great to be a scientist," he said. "I suppose I could have figured that out for myself. Given time. But I'm the slow type."

The phone rang. He excused himself and took it on the extension in the bedroom. It was Boston on the line, a man named Hiram Fitch, head of an agency Max contacted there from time to time. His report was succinct.

On Jonothan Grigsby, nothing recent. Grigsby, with a B.S. from Harvard and a Master's from M.I.T., had formed Grigsby Electronics in Boston and done his early experimental work there. But when he had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

started into big time production, with government orders during the war, he had moved his headquarters to New York.

On Patricia Parson, not much more. Pat had been an honor student at M.I.T. She'd taken a postgraduate degree and then joined Grigsby as a research engineer. She'd been active in athletics and amateur dramatics, and apparently had had very few dates. There was no record of any romantic attachments to any fellow students.

"That's it, Max," Hiram said from his office somewhere in downtown Boston. "Better try the New York end. By the way, we read the papers here too. Good luck, fellow. But just in case, do you prefer roses or lilies?"

Max good-naturedly suggested an impractical course of action to be performed with a dozen thorny roses and hung up.

Before he had taken his hand from the receiver the phone rang again. Long distance had been holding a call, waiting for him to disconnect. It was Reno this time, a private investigator Max had confidence in, Rick Randy. Randy had a fair amount of information to impart. The dope he had dug up on Marshall Dunn checked with what Grigsby had previously told Max — Dunn, a small-time gambler, had left Reno by request about eighteen months previously. There had been complaints about his place from time to time, but he had stayed out of actual trouble until a final complaint by a prominent citizen had resulted in his getting the boot. Nobody had proved he ran a crooked game but the evidence was impressive.

The material on the dead Larraine Grigsby was scanty. She had been seen frequently in Dunn's company away from his club, The Dunngeon. She had not tried to make any other men friends, and had not been chummy with any women, either, except for a crib girl named Polly Smith, whom she had somehow met and taken a liking to.

"Contact Smith," Max cut in at this point. "Ask what Larraine Grigsby talked about. Try to get the real picture of her relationship with Dunn — whether they were planning to stay together after her divorce, especially."

"I thought of that." Randy's tone was reproachful. "She isn't here any more. You know these girls; they don't stay put. Polly was an independent. Probably she met up with some man and left town with him. Nobody knows for sure, but her landlady said she left owing two weeks' back rent. She left some of her things behind, maybe to make up for the rent. There was an expensive vanity set with the initials L. G. on it, and an evening dress from Sak's Fifth Avenue in New York. The landlady still remembered those two because she wondered how a crib girl acquired them."

"Apparently she and Mrs. Grigsby were chummy enough so that Grigsby gave her stuff she didn't want any more," Max suggested.

"That seems to be it. Anyway, Polly Smith left Reno almost two years

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ago. Nobody paid any attention at the time — nobody cares much how those girls come and go. The landlady sold the stuff left behind and rented the place the next day."

"Thanks, Randy." He hung up, and rubbing his jaw with his thumb, went back to Pat.

"I heard some of what you said on the phone." She spoke quietly. "I tried not to listen, but I couldn't help overhearing. You were getting a report on me, weren't you?"

"Among others," Max London agreed. "I spent fifty dollars and learned that you didn't have many dates in college."

"I guess that's right."

"You set a pretty high standard in men, huh?"

"I — suppose so. The men I've met since I was in my teens have seemed so — inane. So juvenile. Or else so false."

"Including Jonothan Grigsby?"

"Oh no." She shook her head. "John was very genuine. A brilliant, introverted man and a simply terrible judge of women."

"You couldn't have been in love with him and been jealous of his wife?"

"Of course not! I was never in love with John. He was friend, an associate, a teacher, and sometimes a little bit of a father."

"But Nola married him. She's no older than you are. And his first wife was young too. He liked young women, maybe?"

"Yes." She nodded. "He was so — so tied up himself. Larrie was vivacious and seemed to adore him. He was stimulated and flattered — and he married her. Then of course, when he found out she had no moral sense whatever, that nothing she felt like doing seemed wrong to her, that she didn't have a vestige of conscience, it almost wrecked him."

"Then he went ahead and married another young wife, Nola. Why?"

"She was his secretary. She was calm and helpful and subordinated herself to him. He turned to her in a sort of desperation, I think. I was in Europe when it happened, or I'd have tried to prevent it. I was sure she had no special feelings for him, outside of seeing a good chance to raise herself in the world. But I got back too late."

"Mmm." Max ground out the cigarette. "Damn it, we keep getting back to the case. We hadn't even picked a subject to talk about and here we are, beating the rug again. Suppose we talk about you."

"I'm afraid that's a rather unrewarding subject." Her tone was stiff. "I'm not very interesting."

"You don't like any of the men you meet," Max continued, eyeing her. "Except one, who's like a father to you. For the rest, you set such high standards that the result is, you're still a virgin."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was rewarded by a flush that flooded her bosom, throat and cheeks. "Since when has that been a disgrace?"

"Not a disgrace. More of a novelty. Selma, the girl you saw me taking pictures of yesterday — for one of Pete's articles, if you're interested. . . ."

"I'm not, in the least."

"Is also a virgin. That's two I met the same day." He shook his head. "It hasn't happened in years."

"I think I had better go." Cold, poised, Patricia Parson stood up. So did Max.

"If you want to," he said. "But first —" He took a step forward, took her in his arms and kissed her. Violently and not briefly. In shocked outrage she held herself rigid in his arms, trying to push him away. But this time he did not yield. He kissed her thoroughly and then, just as abruptly, let her go.

She stood staring at him, her cheeks flaming. "You — you animal!" she said.

"You got that out of a book," Max murmured. "You never thought it up for yourself. You should apologize to yourself for saying it."

She held herself stiff for another outraged instant. Then she began to laugh, shakily.

"Yes, of course," she whispered. "It's — silly. Just tell me — was that because you wanted to, or was it to prove another point?"

"Partly both," Max told her. "But this time will be just for my own enjoyment."

She did not avoid him. After a moment, she responded to him. In his arms her body relaxed, soft and warm and sweet.

"Oh, Max," she whispered, when he released her. "Oh, Max. If only I —"

The telephone began to ring, with the shrill insistence that always means long distance.

"Hell!" Max said.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It was New York on the wire. Charlie Ruffano, a slick Italian operative who specialized in cases having a business angle, gave him the dope.

As far as it concerned Jonothan Grigsby, it broke no new ground. Grigsby had been having financial troubles, but looked to be able to weather them.

As regarded the dead first wife, Larraine, Charlie simply added more

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

detail to the picture Max had already received. She had been a radio and TV actress for several years, hadn't been very good or very bad, had had several affairs with program directors and advertising agency men who could give her jobs, had specialized in playing high society bitch types and sultry villainesses on soap operas, had never been married before, had been involved in a fatal automobile accident shortly before her marriage, but had got off with a fine and suspended sentence, and had given Jonothan Grigsby every reason in the world for not one but a dozen divorces.

The data about Frank Jordan was more revealing. Jordan, a slick promoter rather than a scientist or inventor, had put together a company early in 1942 by buying up various electronics patents. He'd gotten a government contract, presumably through influence, then on the strength of the contract raised finance money and been in business.

After the war he was in some trouble with the Treasury Department on suspicion of padding cost-plus bills, but got out of it. He had also been suspected of black market operations in crucially scarce metals, but again nothing had been proved.

Now, on the strength of his patents, he was trying to push his way into TV color picture, presumably aiming at acquiring such a nuisance value he could sell out for a fat profit.

"Okay, Charlie," Max said. "I'd already sized him up along those lines. Now what about that last name I gave you?"

This time Charlie Ruffano delivered pay dirt. There was little to tell about Nola Williams, now Nola Grigsby, but that little was plenty. Before going to work for Grigsby Electronics, she had been employed for two years as secretary by Franklin Jordan. He had frequently visited her during that time at her apartment, and stayed all night.

"Thanks," Max said. "Good job, Charlie."

He hung up. When he returned to the living room Patricia Parson was seated and sipping at a fresh Daiquiri. She had also refilled his glass. Max grinned wryly and dropped onto the sectional sofa.

"Here's to us." He raised his glass.

"Progress, Max?" she asked.

"Too damn much progress. Tell me, last night when you got back to your apartment and got Jordan's first message did it occur to you to phone back as he requested?"

"Of course not."

Max looked thoughtful. "Do you suppose he thought you would?"

"I should think he knew perfectly well I wouldn't call him back."

"Damn it!" he exploded. "Jordan could have phoned you at eleven-thirty last night from someplace near here — that drugstore six blocks away, for

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

instance. He could have left a message to call him back at the Tropical Hotel, knowing you wouldn't call him. Then he could have hurried on to the hotel, called again around midnight, pretended to be lushed up, and he'd have a pretty good alibi for himself.

"Damn," he swore. "A while ago I had eliminated Jordan. Now he's back in the picture again."

"What about me? Am I out of it?"

"Only because I'd rather you were. Actually you still are saddled with as good a motive and opportunity as anybody. And no alibi."

She stood up, "I really have to go now," she said.

"The General Manager of Grigsby Electronics is flying out here. I promised to meet him at the hotel as soon as he arrived, and his plane is just about due. We have a great many business matters concerned with the company's future to discuss."

"Sure," Max agreed. He walked her to the street-side door. "And after that you'll need a vacation. So will I, as soon as I clean this thing up. So think about it."

She refused to meet his eye.

"I'll — think about it," she said. She went out the door, not looking back.

She was a beautiful woman and a hell of a lot smarter than any woman with her looks had a right to be. She had explained away the cigarette without drawing a deep breath.

Scowling, he went back down the hall to the phone. He dialed Cal McVey's home number. On the seventh ring McVey answered.

"Hello, McVey," Max greeted him. "I was hoping you'd be having your day off."

"If this is who I think it is," McVey told him, "I hope you're calling from Afghanistan."

"Thanks for last night. I won't forget it," Max said. "What's the score now? I haven't seen any papers and I can't be bothered with the radio."

"Right now," Cal McVey said grimly, "the score is twelve to nothing against you in the last half of the ninth. The jury wouldn't even leave the box. The lab found your blood and hair on the dead man's cane, and they found a bullet from your gun in the panelling behind the dead man's head."

"But nobody's found the missing ten grand?"

"Not yet. Hugo's not letting that bother him, though."

"What do you know about the killing of Dunn, the gambler, last night at his place, The Dunngeon?"

"Lord, don't tell me you did that too? The boys across the line called us this morning. They had an anonymous tip last night and went out there, found Dunn whipped and shot."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, I know. They have any theories?"

"A gang argument of some kind. They wanted Rienzo checked on. Hugo promised to question him. Eventually they'll ring up a goose egg and forget it."

"Do you happen to know whether Rienzo really has an alibi or not?"

"I don't know — but he does. I can guarantee that much."

"That's how I figure it," Max London agreed. "Tell me, is anybody looking for Dunn's girl friend, Meg Philips?"

"Not that I know of. We weren't asked to find her, anyway. Maybe the boys across the line didn't think of her. Probably they will, though."

"Be nice to have her ready for them."

"She know something?" McVey asked.

"I think so. She may have been telling me the truth, but I have a feeling she wasn't. I'd like to ask her a few more questions."

"You wouldn't know where she is now?"

"She's hiding," Max said. "She's afraid of Rienzo and she isn't anxious to answer any questions, on general principles. I don't blame her, but just the same I want to talk to her again."

"Any suggestions?"

"A couple. In the first place, wherever she is she's got a blue Packard convertible with her. That'll be harder to hide. Fifty-two model." He gave the plate number and McVey made a note of it.

"Description, in case you haven't got it, five feet five or six, tanned, black hair, shoulder length, rather plump — hundred and forty-five pounds, maybe a hundred and fifty. Low, husky voice."

"Thanks," McVey said. "I'll see it goes out on the wire. I'm just about to go down to headquarters to see if we've caught you in L.A., Santa Monica, points south yet. We've been getting a lot of screwy tips. Call me tomorrow," Cal McVey said drily. "See you in jail."

Max cradled the receiver and padded in to take a shower. He was careful not to let his head get wet. The cut on his skull felt much better and seemed to be healing without any complications. He was briskly toweling himself when the phone rang.

Leaving wet footprints on the polished flooring, he strode out to the instrument. "Bates residence," he said into it formally.

"Hello, Max? Is that you, Max?" It was a girlish voice, young and uncertain. He couldn't quite place it.

"Who is speaking, please," Max said with the same formal tone.

"This is Selma — Selma Carle."

"Oh, Selma," he grunted. "Yes, this is Max London."

"I'm so glad," Selma breathed. "Max, I wanted to get in touch with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you and I couldn't think where. Then I thought maybe you'd still be there and I looked up Tom Bates in the book —"

"I hope you're alone," Max told her irritably. "Otherwise you might as well call the police direct and tell them where I am."

"Oh, I'm alone," Selma answered. "I'm at my bungalow."

"If you called about your handbag, yes, it's here."

"Yes, I knew I'd left it there. I'm not calling about that, though, Max."

"No? Then what?"

"It's something — Well, it's crazy, sort of. But I know you're in trouble and something's happened that —"

"Sweetheart," Max begged, "come to the point. I am in trouble. Don't make it worse by making me try to guess what you're trying to say."

"Well, Max," Selma said doggedly, "I was in a restaurant this afternoon. A bar and grill, really. I was there with a girl friend. Two men were sitting in the next booth. And I heard your name mentioned."

"My name? Maybe they were reading the paper. Look, baby —"

"Max, please! Let me tell you. You see, I happened to hear your name, and that made me listen, and then one of the men said, 'Rienzo says the blonde is going to have to make a new arrangement on this thing. London has to be put out of the way.'"

"What did these men look like?"

"Well, my back was to them, and I couldn't turn around to take a good look. But my girl friend could see one of them. She's a fashion artist. So I I asked her to draw a picture of the one she could see. I made it a stunt sort of. I mean I didn't tell her why I wanted it."

"And you have the picture there now?"

"Yes. Do you want it?"

"I want it. Can you bring it out here? And get your handbag at the same time?"

"Gee, Max, I don't feel well enough to drive. We had seafood in that bar and grill and it tasted kind of funny and my stomach keeps feeling upset."

"All right, Selma," he said. "I'll drop in for it. I have to do some moving around town, anyway."

"What time, Max?"

"As soon as it's dark. A little after nine, say."

"I'll be here. I'm going to lie down until my stomach feels better." She hesitated and her young voice was earnest. "Don't take any chances, Max London. Don't let the police catch you."

She hung up. Max put the receiver down.

There was only one blonde in this case. Patricia Parson. But how could she be mixed up with Rienzo?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT WAS AFTER EIGHT when Max, dressed in a chauffeur's uniform, took Bates's Rolls Royce and drove to Selma's apartment, and it was just nine when Max London slid out of the chauffeur's jacket and cap, put them on the floor in the rear, and slipped on his own coat. Then, locking the Rolls, he started to stroll toward the bungalow court which was Selma's address.

There were eight bungalows in the court, set in a double row, four facing four across a stretch of dying grass with a cracked strip of concrete running down the middle. Max turned into the court and walked down the crumbling strip of pavement like a man who belonged there. A fat householder watering a few square feet of brown lawn didn't even glance at him.

Selma had written down *Bungalow D* on the slip of paper she had given him the previous day. Max located that as the fourth on the left, since A was the first on the left.

There was a light on in the front room of D, the shade pulled to within an inch or so of the bottom. Max paused again to light another cigarette and study the square building with its walls of peeling pink stucco.

The night stayed quiet. Max strolled up to the bungalow, mounted the single step to the door, rang the bell and simultaneously tried the knob.

The door opened in. He stepped directly into a cheaply furnished living room. It was empty, a standing lamp with an elaborate shade of rose silk burning by a chintz covered chair. A book was open on the chair arm — a Peter London mystery.

"Selma?" Max raised his voice slightly.

The little bungalow was silent. Max moved across the living room and went through a door that led into a tiny hall. On one side of the hall was a miniature kitchen and a bath. On the other was a closed door probably leading into a bedroom.

Max opened it. Selma was there.

She was lying across the double bed that almost filled the tiny room, in the same costume and almost the same position as she had posed for him in the surf the previous day. She lay on her back, one knee drawn up, one hand dangling over the side of the bed, the other relaxed upon her breast. Her long black hair came down over her shoulders. Against the white counterpane her smoothly tanned skin seemed darker.

She seemed to be sleeping.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you didn't look at her face.

Where her body was almost voluptuously relaxed, her face was swollen and purple. Her lips were drawn back from her teeth, dried blood on her chin where she had bitten them. Her tongue protruded, purplish and swollen.

Around her neck, almost hidden by her hair, was a nylon stocking which had been pulled or twisted to bite deeply into her throat, throttling her.

As Max stared at Selma's body, so young, so sweet, so innocent in death, black rage built up in him.

If Rienzo —

Outside, a whistle blew.

The front door slammed open. Even as Max spun around the bedroom window shattered and the shade flipped up. Fragments of broken glass showered on the soft lines of Selma's nude body.

A submachine gun muzzle poked into the bedroom. Hugo's voice called hoarsely from the living room.

"This place is surrounded, London. If you move we'll let you have it."

With a deliberate effort of will, Max London made his voice normal. "Okay," he said, conversationally. "I'm just putting my hands up. I'm not making any moves."

Outside the window two uniformed cops kept him covered with submachine guns while two plain-clothes men with Police Positives took up positions outside the bedroom door. Two more came in. His face wooden, Max held out his hands. One of the two flipped handcuffs over his wrists.

When that was done, Nelson Hugo at last appeared, his vulture features smiling.

"Hugo," Max said heartily, "I'm glad you're here! I was going to get in touch with you. I've got this whole thing wrapped up now and I wanted to let you and Wharton have the answers so I could clear myself. I've got a date and I can't spend the whole weekend dodging cops."

Nelson Hugo sneered, but the sneer held uncertainty.

Nelson Hugo had his hand in his pocket. If he had any idea of pulling a gun and pretending he'd seen Max make a suspicious move, he abandoned it. He took his hand out. Empty.

"Bring him along, O'Connor," he said. "Sure, London, we're on our way to Headquarters. So nice of you to invite yourself along."

O'Connor held Max's arm. The other plain-clothesman frisked Max.

"Clean," he reported. "But here's something."

He pulled Selma's handbag from Max's pocket. Hugo took it, opened it. Then his eyes lit up. He pulled out a handful of snapshots of Selma in the nude on the beach that Max had taken the day before.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, brother!" he said. "Oh, bro-ther! Have we got you seven ways from Tuesday! Not only did you kill your client, Grigsby, last night, but today you killed this sweet little kid you've been fooling around with, making her pose for pornographic pictures and stuff like that. No telling what else you forced her to do, but hell, the jury can use it's own imagination."

Max shook his head, looking at Selma with the broken shards of glass from the window spattered over her.

"No," Max said quietly. "Poor kid, she died a virgin."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE HANDS OF the electric clock on the wall scissored their way to midnight. London sat upright in the straight-backed chair, his square, battered countenance set like weathered gray granite. Plump, round-faced Fred Wharton, the acting D.A. — the D.A. himself was usually off making speeches someplace — slumped in his leather swivel chair behind his big desk and mopped his face. Chief Nelson Hugo stalked back and forth across Wharton's office like a lean, hungry leopard slavering to get at a staked-out bait, and not quite daring to for fear of a trap.

"Listen," Hugo rasped, his voice hoarse from alternate shouting, swearing and snarling at Max London, "we're not getting anywhere, Fred. Let me take him downstairs to the tank and really sweat him. I'll have a couple of my best men apply persuasive tactics to him. He won't keep holding out then."

"No, Nelson," Wharton said. "Maybe there's some truth to his story. I don't know." He passed a weary hand over his forehead. "He's smart enough not to make up a story he knew we'd check on and find phony."

"Yeah?" The thin man's lips curled. "He's also smart enough to figure we'd think that way. So, caught dead to rights, he spins a wild story counting on the fact we credit him with more sense than to tell such a bare-faced lie." He stopped at Wharton's desk, behind which the plump little politician seemed lost and helpless. From his hip pocket he took a flask, sloshed a shot of liquor into a water glass and filled the glass from a carafe. He caught London watching him. "Want a drink?" he jeered. "Here, have this one!"

He stepped forward and flung the mixture of whiskey and water into Max's face.

London sat rigid, blinking the liquid from his eyes.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thanks, Nellie," he said. "Next time I'll open my mouth."

Fred Wharton, who had leaped to his feet, evidently expecting trouble, groaned. He had a gun in his hand — a big .45 automatic. He dropped it back into the upper left hand drawer of his desk.

"Nelson, you shouldn't have done that," he said.

"All right, Fred," Hugo said. "You call the signals. You won't let me handle this my way. Suppose you get on the ball, then."

"I'm just trying to make sure of our ground, Nelson," he squeaked. "After all, we can't afford to go off the deep end if there's any chance we're wrong. I'm the one who has to take him into court, you know.

"Now I know we have him dead to rights for killing Grigsby. But maybe he didn't kill the girl after all. If he didn't, then possibly there's something in the story he's told us. And damn it to hell, I don't want to stick my neck out and get caught with my pants down."

"You mean you think he didn't invent this whole absurd yarn about the dead girl overhearing a conversation in a bar linking Tony Rienzo and some blonde in an attempt to kill him?" Hugo snorted.

"He probably did make it up," Wharton said placatingly. "But let's have Lieutenant McVey in. He's been in charge of checking up on the story and maybe he'll have something to report."

Hugo shrugged. Fred Wharton pressed a buzzer and a uniformed officer stuck his head in.

"Send in McVey," Hugo snapped. The cop vanished. A moment later Cal McVey strode in. He looked from Hugo to Wharton, ignoring London completely.

"You've been checking up on London's story," Wharton said. "What have you found out?"

"Nothing more than we knew an hour ago," McVey answered. "This morning about nine-thirty the Carle girl left her bungalow, got her car and drove off. She didn't come back until around two. A short time later one of the neighbors thinks she saw another girl going in Carle's bungalow, but isn't sure, wasn't paying attention.

"This could be the girl she had lunch with, according to London's story. But we haven't located any bar and grill where they recognized her picture. Of course, we haven't covered all the places in the city. We tore the bungalow apart and didn't find any sketch of a man's face in the place.

"What about the autopsy?" Wharton asked. "How far has Doc Haffner got on that?"

"He's been working with a specialist from Municipal Hospital for a couple of hours," McVey reported. "But I don't know what he's learned."

"Have him come up here," Wharton ordered. "He should know by now."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

McVey nodded and turned. He went out.

"Now look, Fred," Nelson Hugo said persuasively as the door shut. "There's only one part of London's story with any truth in it — about the girl's phoning him. She probably wanted to see him, maybe she was even in love with him, the poor, deluded kid. He was afraid she might spill the beans about him to us. So he sneaked out and went to her bungalow, taking that shortcut which would keep anyone from seeing him.

"Sure, Nelson," Wharton said. "It could be. But then why did he go back at nine? Why did he make up the story he told us, knowing he couldn't prove it? He's smart enough to think up a better lie than that, if he's going to tell a lie."

"Fred," the chief of police snapped, "I don't know. But I know the story of the phone conversation is a lie because it just has to be a lie! Now I ask you, coldly and logically, what are the chances that this girl, practically the only person in this end of California who might warn London, should be the exact one to overhear such a significant conversation? It's stretching coincidence too far to believe in it. Mathematically, the odds are a million to one against it and I don't take the short end of such odds, believe me."

Max stiffened.

"Well, Nelson," Fred Wharton agreed unhappily, "that does sound logical, the way you put it."

"Who killed Malcolm Dunn at The Dunngeon last night?" Max asked coldly. "Who chain-whipped him and shot him? Maybe you want to pin that on me too."

"I think you did it," Hugo snapped. "I have a hunch Dunn knew something about some crooked deal you were trying to pull. In any case, we know Mr. Rienzo is in the clear. I've checked on him and he has a solid alibi from midnight on."

Max shrugged. "When a cheap gutter rat like Rienzo has a solid alibi," he drawled, "any honest man can guess he's guilty of something. But maybe you're not a very good guesser."

Nelson Hugo turned white with rage, but before he could say anything more, Doc Haffner came bustling in.

"You hurried me, gentlemen," he rattled out. "But I guess we've learned everything pertinent. Death caused by strangulation. Nylon stocking twisted around the throat with a ruler to give leverage. No fingerprints, I understand."

"Hell, we know that," Hugo told him.

"Time of death, indeterminate —"

"Now wait a minute. You originally said between four and five p.m."

"I know, I know, but that was just a guess. It's been a warm day and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that bungalow held the heat. Might have retarded the body cooling. So it could have been as early as two-thirty or three p.m., as late as five-thirty. Sorry, can't make it any closer than that."

"Well, anyway," Nelson Hugo rasped, "tell me this? Had she recently been assaulted?"

"In the sense that she was certainly murdered," Doc Haffner went on blandly. "But if you're giving the word the meaning I think you are, the answer is no. She was a virgin."

He turned and pattered out. Fred Wharton sighed.

"See, Nelson?" he appealed. "Maybe London's story about the girl just being a model of whom he took some pictures for an article is true."

"Sure, maybe he's just a poor, misunderstood kid we're all picking on," the chief of police answered. "Look, why not play it my way? Book him for the Grigsby murder. You can wrap that up easily. As for the Dunn killing, that's out of our jurisdiction, so even if we can't tie him to it, it doesn't matter. Although my own theory is he was trying to work some deal with Dunn, who was a small-time chiseler, got into an argument with him and chain-whipped him before he shot him in an effort to throw suspicion on Rienzo. He was sore at Rienzo, you see — beat up a couple of Rienzo's boys earlier last night.

"Oh hell, I guess you're right. We'll just stick firmly to the evidence we have in the Grigsby killing and land him on that without —"

There was a knock on the door. He interrupted himself to yap, "Come in."

Cal McVey entered.

"Just had a report," he announced. "That pickup order on the Philips woman, Dunn's common-law wife —"

"Yes?" Wharton blinked.

"The State police have picked her up. They just nabbed her about a hundred and ninety miles north, heading for 'Frisco. She'd stopped for gas and a trooper having coffee spotted the license plate."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

NELSON HUGO WHIRLED.

"What's this about a pickup order on Dunn's common-law wife?" he asked. "I never issued it!"

"I had it sent out, chief," Cal McVey replied, his long face expres-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sionless. "The Montdale district attorney asked us to cooperate, and when we got an anonymous tip that the woman had run away, I had the pickup order sent out statewide."

"An anonymous tip?" Hugo looked suspicious.

"This afternoon sometime." Lieutenant McVey's voice was flat. "Just after I got to my office the phone rang. Informant wouldn't give his name."

"I should have been informed about it!"

"Hell, can't pile every detail on you, Nelson," Fred Wharton said. "Anyway, it's no skin off our tails one way or the other. It's Montdale wants her, not us."

Hex waved Cal McVey out.

"Take care of it, lieutenant," he said.

Cal nodded and still studiously ignoring Max London, went out.

"All right, Nelson," the acting D.A. said then. "We'll play it your way. Take London down to the tank and see if you can make him talk. I'm damn sick and tired of the runaround he's been giving us. But even if he don't talk it won't matter — we'll concentrate on the Grigsby murder."

"I thought you'd agree with me," Nelson Hugo said with satisfaction. "I'll have some of the boys come and take him."

He started toward the door. At last Max stirred.

"Hold it," he said. He turned a blank gaze on Fred Wharton. Wharton mopped his brow again. "I'm ready to do a little talking. In fact, I'm prepared to sign a confession."

The chief of police came back, looking suspicious. "What kind of confession?" he demanded.

"A confession I killed Jonothan Grigsby," London told him.

"Well?" He looked at the two men. "All I ask in return is one little piece of information."

"I guess that'll be all right," Wharton said, his tone relieved.

"How did you and your men happen to be on hand to pick me up at Selma Carle's bungalow?" Max asked Nelson Hugo.

"You can tell him that," Wharton put in. "No harm in him knowing that I can see."

"I suppose not," the vulture-faced chief of police grudgingly agreed. "Well, about half past five, I had a phone call. It was from a woman. Southern accent. She wouldn't give her name, but she said her sister had just come home from work and her sister was a telephone operator.

"This woman said that her sister told her that during the afternoon she had been placing a toll call to Vista Beach 7-1114 and had accidentally

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plugged in 1141 — an easy mistake to make, see? Well, someone was on the line and before she disconnected she heard a woman say, "Don't take any chances, Max London. Don't let the police catch you. I'll expect you here at nine."

"Well this woman said her sister, the telephone operator, didn't connect up your name with the headlines in the papers today until she was reading the evening paper on her way home on the bus. Then she realized she'd heard someone making a date with you. She told her sister, and her sister figured we should know about it so she phoned and spoke to me personally. But she wouldn't give her name, saying her sister didn't want any publicity — it would hurt her on her job.

"So we checked with the phone company. Seven one one four one turned out to be Selma Carle's number. I went there with a squad to question her and we found her dead. But there was a chance to nab you. So instead of removing the body we left everything the way it was and staked-out the area. Then when you came we picked you up. See?"

"Yeah," Max growled. "I see. Dimly. Too bad that operator didn't hear more of the conversation. Then you'd know I'm telling the truth."

"Well, well, never mind about that," Wharton said. "We're interested in Grigsby's murder now. We're ready to take down your confession. I'll have a stenographer come in."

"Better wait until I've gone over the details," Max suggested.

"Well?" Both men looked expectant.

"This is my confession. Jonothan Grigsby hired me to recover some promissory notes signed by his dead wife two years ago, and at that time in the possession of Marshall Dunn. Dunn happened to remark to me that if Grigsby wouldn't pay off he'd sell the notes to Tony Rienzo.

"However, Grigsby was agreeable to paying up to ten thousand for the notes. I was to make the deal. But I got to thinking just how valuable those notes might be in the hands of a smart operator like Tony Rienzo. He might be able, by a mixture of bluff, threats and legal action to obtain an interest in Grigsby's TV color patents for them. Then, the way Rienzo works, he could give Grigsby the boot and take over the firm.

"I know Rienzo, like the other big thieves, is always looking for new ways to acquire legitimate interests. I approached him and suggested a deal. For fifty thousand dollars I could get him the notes and he could take over from there. I didn't tell him, naturally, that Dunn had the notes — I said a 'certain party.' He agreed and —"

"Now wait a minute!" Nelson Hugo exploded.

"Let's hear this!" Fred Wharton put in abruptly. "Go on, London."

"He agreed and I went out to Grigsby's house at the beach to get the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ten thousand dollars Grigsby had ready for me. I planned to buy the notes from Dunn, sell them to Rienzo, then give ten thousand back to Grigsby, saying Dunn wouldn't make a deal. That way I'd have had a profit of forty thousand.

"Grigsby got suspicious. He swung on me with his cane. I went wild with rage. I shot him. Then I tried to make a getaway with the money."

"Why didn't we find it then?" Hugo snarled.

"I'm coming to that. Outside in the yard I ran into Marshall Dunn who'd just got there, not knowing a date we'd set up was called off. I swung on him, and he knocked me out. Then, realizing what must have happened, he took the ten thousand and beat it. On the way he phoned the tip to Headquarters that got you out there so fast, Hugo."

"The whole story is a damned lie!" Hugo said, his face white. "Rienzo —"

Wharton was looking unhappy. He mopped his forehead again, and waved at the chief of police to be quiet. "Finish it, London," he said.

"Well, that's almost all. As soon as I escaped last night, I phoned Rienzo. He promised to take care of Dunn — to eliminate him as a witness and at the same time get the notes from his safe. That's why Dunn was killed later — Rienzo was making good on his promise.

"Then today Selma called me. By some wild chance she'd heard a conversation linking me and Rienzo with Grigsby's death. I phoned Rienzo again and told him. He said he'd send somebody to take care of Selma, too. That's how I came to be there at nine — I went to make sure she'd been eliminated.

"I was worried about leaving my hideout, but Rienzo told me not to waste any sweat over it. He said that he had Nelson Hugo in his pocket, that he was paying heavy to set up an organization, and he'd fix it if I —"

"That's enough!" His lips white, Hugo strode forward and exploded a fist against London's mouth. The detective fell over backward in the chair and lay there, blood coming from a cut lip. The chief of police stood over him, raging.

"You made up that story from beginning to end!" he screamed. "All except the part about your killing Grigsby! I'll get you downstairs in the tank and by the time I've finished you'll be down on bended knees begging for a chance to tell the truth."

"That's my story," Max said from the floor. "That's the story I'll tell on the witness stand. The jury will believe me, all right. It won't matter if Rienzo has alibis. He always has alibis. Everybody will figure he had his boys do the dirty work.

"Public sentiment will be aroused to drive him out of this town. He'll be pretty sore about that. And the public will believe you're Rienzo's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man too, even if I can't actually prove it. Not only because it's true, but because the way I'll tell it will sound so logical. After all —" he gave Hugo a bloody grin — "a man doesn't lie himself into the gas chamber, does he?"

Max rolled over and got to his feet as Wharton grabbed Nelson Hugo and pulled him away. Then the acting D.A. once more put back in the drawer the .45 he'd grabbed out in a panic.

"That's my confession," Max said. "Unless you'll play ball with me."

Fred Wharton sounded weary. "What's your idea of ball?"

"Somebody has been trying to frame me," Max told him. "Somebody has done a lot of lying in the last twenty-four hours. Get everybody connected with the case here in your office, Wharton. Let me talk to them in a group for fifteen minutes. After that I'll be able to tell you who's guilty. I guarantee it."

"Bluff," Nelson Hugo said thinly. "Don't listen to him, Fred. He's a hooked fish and he's trying to get line. Let's just haul him in."

Wharton licked his lips. "I don't like it," he complained. "I'm the one who has to prosecute him. And if he tells that story on the stand, in public — and Lord knows what else he'll add to it — the papers will play it up big. Public sentiment will probably call for an investigation of your whole department. The mayor will be angry at me, and sorry he ever appointed you, and he'll probably get rid of both of us. The party will drop us —" He broke off as if about to burst into sobs.

"Not only will I tell the story," Max added, "but my brother Pete already has it typed up ready for release to all papers as soon as I'm indicted. I phoned him yesterday and he's standing by ready to fire both barrels."

"Nelson," Wharton pleaded. "Suppose we do have a little conference in my office, off the record. Just you and me and London and — who else, London?"

"Mrs. Grigsby," Max said. "And Franklin Jordan. Patricia Parson. Meg Philips. And, by all means, Tony Rienzo."

"No!" Hugo refused. "That's out. He's in the clear. He wouldn't come and we can't make him."

"Ask him," London suggested. "Tell him what the papers will soon be saying about him. Believe me, the story I'll tell will be so detailed and watertight that Rienzo will believe it himself."

"No!" Hugo rasped. "Because I can prove it's a lie. Last night at The Dunngeon you beat up two of Rienzo's boys — his bodyguard. They're in critical condition in the hospital. Would you have done that if you and Rienzo were really working together?"

"No," Max said calmly. "But that's what brought us together. After

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he saw how I operated, he made me a proposition. I took him up on it and suggested that our first deal be for those notes.

Baffled fury spread over Nelson Hugo's features. Wharton got out his handkerchief to mop his face for the twentieth time.

"I guess we'll just have to try it, Nelson," he moaned. "A little conference here in my office. Tomorrow morning early. Nine o'clock, say. You fix it with Rienzo so he'll come. Explain to him it's just a favor to us — we're sure he's not involved in any way. As a prominent and respected citizen of Vista Beach, he's merely aiding us to administer justice.

"After all —" he mopped his head again "— since Kefauver stirred up things even a rotten gangster has to worry about public opinion."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AT HALF PAST EIGHT the next morning a guard let Lieutenant Cal McVey into Max London's cell, relocked the door, and moved away. McVey sat down on the one stool.

"Well," he said, looking at London curiously: "you've sure played hell. I'm damned if I know who has the ball. But it looks to me like you're going to lose the ball game no matter what happens."

"Rienzo going to show up?"

"He's upstairs in the chief's office now with his mouthpiece, having a long, confidential chat."

"What about Meg Philips?"

"State police brought her in around half past three this morning. She's in the woman's block."

"What about the others?"

"They're on deck. Jordan protested like the devil, but he came. I gave him an escort." A flicker of a smile touched the detective's lips.

"Mrs. Grigsby?"

"She came with a little urging. Miss Parson didn't need any persuading."

"Then everybody's here," Max commented. "Time to go up yet?"

"Not quite. The chief will phone down. Probably when he has finished giving Rienzo reassurances."

"I'm ready any time. But I'd like to ask Meg Philips one question before the session starts. Any chance of talking to her for thirty seconds?"

Cal McVey looked at him through half-lowered lids. "Not a chance." One eyelid drooped slightly and lifted again. McVey rose.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Guard," he called. To Max he said, "I'll go tell the matron to take Philips up. Then I'll come back for you."

The guard opened the door. McVey went out without looking back. The guard locked the door. Max stretched out again. But he was no longer relaxed. Slowly he was winding up inside.

In ten minutes Cal McVey came back. He twisted a pair of nippers around Max's wrist and led him out into the cell corridor, down to an elevator manned by an armed operator, and then up six floors.

The top floor corridor held two uniformed cops standing guard before two doors a few feet apart. They watched curiously as McVey led Max to the nearer door and opened it.

Inside was a tiny, bare, windowless room furnished only with half a dozen straight back chairs. In one of them Meg Philips was sitting. Beside her sat a low-slung, heavyset matron.

Meg still wore the white dress, but now it was crumpled and soiled. Her hair was combed down almost to her shoulder, and she had been allowed to use lipstick.

She gave Max a tremulous smile.

Max London shrugged and sat down opposite Meg. His face expressed nothing. Meg folded her hands in her lap and looked down at them.

McVey took the nippers off.

"I'll guard the witnesses, matron," he said. "This may be a long session. You're relieved until you're needed to return the woman to her cell."

"Very well, lieutenant." Stolidly the woman rose and moved to the door with all the feminine grace of a Mack truck with a flat tire.

She opened the door and started out. McVey took a step after her.

"Oh, matron!" he called. He followed her outside, keeping a foot in the door, his body on the outside. His voice rose slightly, asking the matron a question about a woman named Jane something.

"Max!" Meg breathed, her eyes wide. "Oh, Max! What's happening? All they'll tell me is that this is a conference of some kind."

"They think they've got me nailed down," Max muttered under his breath. "They're hell-bent to get me into the gas chamber. But they haven't got me there yet. If I can't prove I'm innocent, that prize fool Wharton keeps a gun in his left hand top drawer. I'll get hold of it and get out of here yet. But if you'll tell me just one thing—"

Max clamped his mouth shut as McVey stepped back inside. His face went blank. Meg's eyes unlocked from his and looked down at her hands.

"Any minute now," McVey said. "It's nine. I'll check. . . ."

Half a dozen extra chairs had been moved into Wharton's office. Wharton himself sat nervously behind his big desk, rocking a little in his swivel

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chair. Nelson Hugo sat a little to one side of Wharton, his lips thin and his nose pinched.

Wharton cleared his throat. "We're all here," he said, Adam's apple working, "so I guess we can start this little talk."

"Shall I wait outside?" Cal McVey asked.

Wharton exchanged a glance with Hugo and the chief of police nodded.

"Stay just outside the door," he said. "In case we need you."

"Before we begin —" Rienzo's lawyer bounced to his feet — "I suggest that we have a dangerous criminal in the room with us. A man of known violence and murderous tendencies. I insist that he be handcuffed."

"Okay," Max shrugged. "Handcuff me. Although if we were going by that description it's Rienzo there who rates the jewelry."

He held out his wrists. Hugo nodded and McVey stepped forward, took cuffs from his pocket and locked them around Max's wrists. Then he went out, closing the door behind him.

Wharton cleared his throat again. "I want to thank Mr. Rienzo and the rest of you," he began, "for agreeing to attend this conference. Now London here —" he glanced at Max who was sitting with his granite features immobile, staring across at Tony Rienzo — "is charged with a very serious crime. Murder, in fact. The evidence is strong against him. I might say, conclusive. However, London claims the evidence has been framed, and thinks that if all of you — ah, pool your knowledge, yes, that's it, pool your knowledge —"

"Let me do the talking, Fred," Nelson Hugo suggested, with thinly veiled contempt. "As Mr. Wharton says," he went on smoothly, "if all of you pool your knowledge we may very quickly be able either to prove or disprove the charges against London, thereby saving much time and — ah, unpleasantness." His eyes flicked to Rienzo's impassive face.

"Very well, London," he said. "This is the opportunity which you requested and which we, merely to show our desire to play fair, have afforded you. However, I warn you — any unsupported charges against anyone here and this discussion will be terminated."

"Thank you, Mr. Hugo," Max said, with deep-throated rumble of mock humility. "I know your reputation for fairness and that's what I'm counting on." He glanced at Wharton's top lefthand drawer, which was ajar.

"Two nights ago," Max began, his voice flat, "somebody opened my scalp and left me unconscious. While I was out, Jonothan Grigsby was killed and ten thousand dollars stolen from him. The police theory is that he and I fought, that he hit me with his cane, I killed him, then staggered outside and collapsed. But nobody has been able to say yet where the money is I'm supposed to have stolen.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You all know that much, and perhaps some of you honestly think I killed my client. But I've never killed a client yet and I don't like such stories circulating — it's bad for business.

"I've been working out various theories in my mind. The one I became fondest of is that Rienzo there, our highly respected representative of organized crime, is the guilty party. According to my best theory, he followed me, slugged me, killed Grigsby, and then later killed Marshall Dunn to eliminate a possible witness. Still later he had Selma Carle killed because she overheard something she shouldn't have."

"Now wait a minute!" It was Rienzo's lawyer. "Mr. Wharton! I'm going to instruct my client to leave this discussion."

"It's all right, little legal buzzard," Max said. "I'm not going to insist on that theory. I just said I liked it. After all," Max said, "Rienzo is a careful man. He never commits a murder he can get someone else to commit for him. Anyway, I just couldn't figure out a genuine motive for him to kill Grigsby.

"So I worked out a few other theories. For instance, I theorized that Mrs. Grigsby knew I was coming, hid, slugged me and killed her husband for personal reasons. I theorized that Franklin Jordan, her former lover —" Jordan turned pale, but did not interrupt — "might have helped her. Or that he might have done it alone without her knowledge. But I couldn't fit either of them into Dunn's death, or Selma Carle's. And I'm positive all three are connected.

"I next theorized that Miss Parson —" Max turned to look momentarily at her pale, immobile face — "might have killed her partner to prevent him from selling the firm. But again I couldn't connect her with the other murders.

"Then, having just about run out of suspects, I figured out how Miss Philips here beside me —" Max looked down at Meg. She still sat looking down at her folded hands. "— might have followed me, slugged me, and killed Grigsby in order to get the money her boy friend needed so badly.

"But since she knew I proposed to pay the money to him, the motive was pretty weak. And besides, whoever slugged me was dressed in something dark. All I saw when it happened was a glimmer of a face in the darkness. Miss Philips was wearing white that evening. It couldn't have been her who sneaked up on me — I'd have been able to make out her white coat in the shadows. That put me in a hell of a position for a detective, didn't it?" he asked. "I'd cleared all my suspects, just leaving myself to take the rap."

"I don't see that this is getting us anywhere," Wharton put in. "All you've said is that nobody but you can be guilty. Therefore —"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm not quite through," Max said. "You see, having used up all my suspects, I had to make a fresh start. And, a little late, I realized something I'd overlooked. If anybody had followed me around to the side of Grigsby's place two nights ago, they'd have had to walk along a gravel path. I'd surely have heard the gravel crunch.

"Then another point: I was hit with a croquet mallet. A stranger arriving in the darkness couldn't have known there were croquet mallets lying around on the lawn. That makes two good reasons why I couldn't have been hit by someone who followed me, either on purpose or accidentally. Obviously then, I *had* to be slugged by someone already there, hiding in the bushes when I arrived, with a croquet mallet ready," he finished, looking at Nola Grigsby.

"That's — that's absurd," the girl said faintly. "You're just being — vicious. I couldn't have knocked a man unconscious. I'm not — not strong enough. And I wouldn't know how!" she ended in a cry.

"Just a minute," Max said. "Jordan, are *you* strong enough to knock a man out with a croquet mallet?"

"What do you mean by that?" the Easterner blustered. "I certainly didn't knock *you* out, if that's what you're hinting at."

"Well," Max said, with a smile that showed only his teeth, "at my trial my lawyer is going to insist you did. This is the picture my lawyer is going to give the jury," Max said. "He's going to say to the jury, here's a woman who worked for Franklin Jordan for two years before she went to work for Jonothan Grigsby — a woman who was his mistress."

Nola Grigsby gave a choked cry, and covered her face with her hands.

"Then, my lawyer is going to say, here's the evidence that the dead man believed this Franklin Jordan was stealing secrets from his firm. But how did he steal them? The answer is obvious — by connivance with this woman, formerly his secretary, later Grigsby's secretary, and then his wife. Isn't it plain, my lawyer will ask the jury, that she went to work for Jonothan Grigsby, and later married him, to further a plot between herself and Jordan?"

"It's a lie," Jordan choked. "It's a filthy lie."

"It's not a lie," Max rasped. "I can prove it. And here's the rest of the story as we'll tell it. Jonothan Grigsby came out here for a rest. You followed to keep putting pressure on him to sell out while he was still discouraged. Then he hired me, a private detective. You and Mrs. Grigsby were sure he'd hired me to check up on you.

"She sent you a message to come see her for a conference. You didn't dare meet in the house — Grigsby was staying up late. The two of you were whispering together in the yard when you heard me arrive. I knocked

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the door; the two of you slipped into the thick shrubbery. You, Jordan, picked up a croquet mallet. You were wearing a conventional Tux, she was wearing a dark coat. You turned up the lapels of your jacket and you were invisible in the bushes as I came by.

"You were probably willing to wait and let me go on in, but I saw something on the ground — a piece of folded notepaper. I'm guessing that sheet of paper was the note from Mrs. Grigsby urging you to come see her, secretly. You both knew that if I picked up that note and took it in to Grigsby, your goose was cooked.

"On the spur of the moment you, Jordan, leaned forward and conked me with the mallet. I went down. You picked up the note. Then it occurred to you this was your opportunity. You could kill Jonothan Grigsby, get him out of the way forever, and frame me for it. You took the gun from my pocket —"

"No, no, no!" Nola Grigsby screamed. "We didn't, we didn't, we didn't! We didn't kill John! I loved John!"

"Nola, shut up!" Frantically Frank Jordan tried to pull her down into her chair, but she struggled to her feet and faced Max London.

"Yes, Frank hit you!" she cried. "To keep you from picking up the letter. It was a note from me telling Frank he must stay away, never contact me again. I did steal secrets from John in the beginning. But I changed. I did. I loved him. I —"

Weeping hysterically, she sank down into her chair and bent forward, her face buried in her hands. Beside her Jordan opened his mouth futilely, but no words came out.

Max turned. "There goes your case against me, Wharton," he said. "She's admitted they knocked me unconscious. So I couldn't have killed Grigsby."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WHARTON AND NELSON HUGO exchanged looks of startled dismay.

"Is this true, Mrs. Grigsby?" Nelson Hugo demanded. "You and Jordan knocked London unconscious in your garden?"

She nodded. Her words came between her fingers, ragged with sobs. "Frank did. Frank told me afterwards he had to do it, we couldn't let the detective see the letter he dropped when we hid in the bushes. It was a letter I sent telling him to stay away, not to ever try to see me again,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I wouldn't have anything more to do with him. . . ."

Hugo looked at Jordan. "I deny it!" the businessman said loudly. "She's hysterical. I demand we be allowed to leave here at once "

No one answered that. Max picked up the ball again.

"So you see, Jordan," he said bleakly, "if I stand trial, that's the line my lawyer will take. You two knocked me out. Then you decided your chance had come and you killed Grigsby, and decided to frame me for it. As soon as you had finished shooting him and smearing my blood on his cane, Mrs. Grigsby hurried to her room and took a sleeping tablet so she'd be properly groggy when the police came. You drove away fast, and stopped at a drugstore a few blocks off. First you telephoned a tip to the police, so they'd be sure to find me.

"Then you phoned Miss Parson at her hotel. When she wasn't in you left a message for her to call you back at the Tropical Hotel, knowing you were safe — she wouldn't call you because she didn't want to talk to you. After that you hurried to the Tropical Hotel, in order to call her again around midnight and solidify your alibi. You —"

"No!" Frank Jordan's face had turned pale. He waved his hand frantically to make Max stop. "We didn't kill him! We just knocked you out and got the letter back, that's all. Nola went to her room and I hurried downtown. Well, it's true I called Miss Parson from a drugstore, but that was only a precaution so I wouldn't be suspected of being out at the beach. But we don't know a thing about the murder! Not a thing!"

He licked his lips, and looked at Wharton and Hugo, who were glaring at him. "We — we didn't say anything," he faltered, "because we — we didn't want to be involved. We were afraid if we — we told what we knew, we'd be suspected. We knew London was probably hiding in the Bates house, but we didn't say anything because we were sure he'd find the real killer and we wouldn't have to —"

"Well," Max said, shrugging, "it certainly looks as if I'd found the real killers. I might go on looking further — but why should I, when I've already cleared myself and have such a good case against you two?"

Hugo and Fred Wharton were busy exchanging some kind of silent agreement. Nick Rienzo for the first time seemed puzzled. Frank Jordan, drained of all his bluster, quivered like a bowl of Jello in the Super-Chief dining car. "London," he said thickly, "listen! Yesterday you — you suggested I should hire you to find my friend Jack Grigsby's murderer. I've been thinking it over — I'd like to retain you. To find the killer. I'll pay the fee you suggested."

"The fee has doubled since then," Max told him.

"All right, all right," Jordan said eagerly. "To — to see justice done

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it's worth it." Max waited, Jordan hurried on, "I have my checkbook. I'll — I'll write a check now."

"Do that," Max suggested.

The other plunged his hand into his coat pocket, scrabbled around and brought out a folded check book. He sat down and hastily began to pen a check against his knee. Jordan ripped out the check and passed it over.

"There," he said. "Now I'm your client. That's your fee in full, providing you find John Grigsby's murderer. The check is void if you try to prove I killed him."

"Mr. Jordan has hired me in my professional capacity and everyone here is a witness to the conditions of my being retained. It's a perfectly straightforward matter, since he didn't kill Grigsby and is naturally interested in seeing his friend avenged."

"But damn it to hell, you just said —" Wharton began.

"I was just exploring a very plausible theory," Max interjected. "Just as you two did when you charged *me* with the murder. Now I can explore some more theories."

He looked across at Nick Rienzo. "Maybe you'd like to hire me too, Rienzo?"

Rienzo moved his head from side to side, very slightly.

"No, London," he said. "You're smart, but not smart enough to worry me. So go ahead and talk. I'm covered in all directions."

Max looked down at the handcuffs on his wrists.

"Okay." Max shrugged. "Then I'll have to wrap it all up at once. Naturally, now that we know the person who slugged me wasn't the same person who killed Grigsby, we've opened the field a whole lot. Anybody could have come along while I was unconscious.

"Miss Parson could have done it —" he glanced at Patricia Parson's pale, unsmiling face.

"Rienzo could have done it —" he stared at the gangster, who looked over his head and went on smoking.

"Marshall Dunn could have been the guilty party," Max went on, "or even Meg here could have done it."

Meg smiled wanly and shook her head.

"Please don't make jokes, Max," she said huskily. "I'm the only one who didn't have a motive to kill any of them."

"I know, baby," Max said pleasantly. "That really threw a road block in my way for a long time. Just the same, you're the one who killed them all. And did your best to get me gassed for it."

Nelson Hugo had his mouth open. Fred Wharton gaped at London. Even Nola Grigsby took her face out of her hands to stare at Max and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the brunette. Only Rienzo kept on smoking without a flicker of emotion.

"Look here, London," Wharton yapped, "we're sick of your fooling around, you hear? Sick of it!"

"Fooling around?" Max London said, without raising his voice. "I'm not fooling around. I can't take any marks for being so long in realizing it, but at least I know now what happened Friday night."

"Well, go on," Nelson Hugo sneered. "What happened?"

"I went to Jonothan Grigsby's place. Meg followed me. I assume she hadn't found Dunn, and came after me thinking, as I did, he'd go on to Grigsby's as planned.

"She must have got there just two or three minutes after Jordan had beat it, leaving me on the ground unconscious, and Mrs. Grigsby had taken her sleeping tablets and was falling into a drugged sleep.

"Meg found me stretched out unconscious and everything quiet. Probably her first impulse was to help me. Then she looked in the window and saw Grigsby at his desk. It's quite possible he had the ten thousand dollars in his hands, impatiently flipping them like a nervous man might.

"Then her big idea came to her. She took my gun. It's a .32, small enough for a woman to handle. She slipped up on the balcony and into the room. She said something to Grigsby that allayed his suspicion, got close to him, and fired.

"She waited long enough to make sure no one had heard the shot. Then Meg put the money in her bag and took Grigsby's cane. She bloodied it on my head, just to make the frame airtight, and after that she left fast — having put the gun back in my pocket, of course.

"At the first drugstore she came to, she phoned the police. She deliberately lowered her voice, maybe spoke through a handkerchief as well, to sound like a man. Then, having made sure I'd be nabbed and convicted of the murder, she hurried back to The Dunngeon.

"There I suppose she found Marshall Dunn, who'd gotten one of the messages she had left and returned to the club."

"Max, please!" Meg cried desperately. "It sounds so — so plausible! But it's insane! I had no motive! You've said so yourself!"

"That's what kept me from tagging you sooner, baby," Max London said. "All right, the police grabbed me. I got away. The first Meg knew I'd got away was when I phoned her. That shook her up."

"Then the news of Grigsby's death and my escape came over the radio. Maybe Marshall Dunn suspected something then. In any case, Meg knew that as soon as I talked to him, I'd know she'd been lying to me. So, to protect herself — and for another reason I'll come to in a moment — she killed him."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Max no!" Meg's voice was a whisper. "I was fond of Marsh. You can't say I killed him!"

"You killed him about as brutally as anyone could," Max stated. "Dunn was plastered by this time, probably unable to navigate. You steered him into the kitchen, where he fell down. You had a chainjack — probably one left behind when Rienzo's hoodlums removed Righty and Lefty from the premises. You chainwhipped Marshall Dunn. When you realized how much killing a man can take, you got his own gun — and shot him.

"Then you deliberately wrecked the interior of the club to complete the picture of a gang vengeance. Just as you tried to shift Grigsby's killing to me, you tried to shift Dunn's killing to Rienzo."

"No," Meg cried, "no!"

"You packed a couple of bags and started to get out of there. I interrupted you and you tried to run away from me. When I caught up with you, you told me such a plausible story I fell for it and took you along with me. In the morning you were up long before I was, and got ready to make another getaway.

"Then, just as you were leaving the house, what a shock you got! You bumped into Selma Carle just as she was coming down the steps or something. She recognized you. Then you had to improvise still one more murder to get free of the web you'd caught yourself in.

"You hurriedly told Selma some story — you're very good at stories, baby — and got her to go away again without her handbag, which was what she'd come for. She had her car, you had yours — so you persuaded her to follow you to some spot where you could talk to her.

"You told her I was in trouble, maybe, that she shouldn't go near me. You had lunch together and got her to go back to her bungalow to wait for you. She did what you wanted because after all, you spent a whole summer with her a couple of years ago. She thought you were her friend.

"Around about two you went to her bungalow and after waiting awhile to figure out just how to handle the whole matter, you caught her off guard, changing her clothes probably, and strangled her.

"Then you spent a little time rehearsing — practicising her voice. When you were sure you sounded like her, enough to get by over the phone, anyway, you telephoned me. You said you were Selma — I believed you.

"Then you spun that dandy little song and dance about overhearing a conversation in a bar and getting a picture of one of the men. It was pretty far-fetched, but you knew I wanted to get something on Rienzo, and you were sure I'd check on it at least. I bit, all right, and you hung up.

"You badly wanted to make a getaway now, but you wanted to wait until dark, if possible. However, you were getting nervous. So at five-thirty

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you phoned Nelson Hugo's office, put on another of your little impersonations, spun another fancy story — this time about being the sister of a telephone operator who had overheard a telephone conversation of me making a date with Selma for nine o'clock.

"That done, and pretty certain the cops would now pick me up, you slipped away, and killed time until dark. Then you picked up your car from wherever you had hidden it, and hoping that in the dark the license plates wouldn't be noticed, you started north."

Still Meg shook her head from side to side, dumbly.

"Just a couple of things I can't figure, sweetheart," he said. "One is, with ten thousand dollars, why didn't you dump the car and take a plane? That would have gotten you away fast and safely. The other is, did you think that I never would figure out the answers, if I was only safe in jail? . . . No, you don't have to answer that one. I damned near didn't figure it. And there was always a good chance I might be killed resisting arrest.

"Of course," he added, "you could just have phoned the cops and told them to look for me in Tom Bates' house. But you knew that would tip me off right away, didn't you?"

"Max, no." Meg's voice was a whisper. "Tell them you're joking. Please!"

"That's a damned wild attempt to shift guilt to an innocent woman!" Fred Wharton said. "A woman would have to have an awfully good motive to commit one such murder, much less three."

"Her real motive?" Max asked. "Oh, she had one all right. She's dead, and she wanted to come back to life. She's a ghost and she's tired of living in the shadows. She saw her chance to come back from the great beyond and take up a life of luxury where she left off when she died, two years ago in an auto accident.

"Folks, meet the late Larraine Grigsby."

CHAPTER TWENTY

MAX LOOKED AROUND the room. Hugo and Wharton just gaped at him foolishly. Pat Parson, Nola Grigsby and Frank Jordan were all staring at Meg with expressions that mingled consternation, disbelief and frowning half-recognition. Tony Rienzo was absently polishing his diamond.

Meg straightened and threw back her head. When she took her hands from her face it was obvious that no tears had flowed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, look at me!" she cried. "Look at a ghost! Damn you, Max —" her voice broke for a moment — "why did you have to guess?"

"I didn't guess," Max London said. "I figured it out. Finally. But hell, I should have known from the beginning.

"I should have known as soon as I had Nat French's report on those promissory notes. He told me he found several sets of fingerprints on them — then he enumerated three. Three sets, including mine and the dead woman's, he said. But I saw you touch them, I knew I had touched them, and I knew Dunn had touched them — there were three right there. If there were only three altogether, including the dead woman's — you must be the dead woman.

"Oh, I had more chances after that. I saw the sunlamp you used to keep your skin tanned to a brunette shade. I knew that a blonde crib girl vanished from Reno just about the time Larraine Grigsby had her auto accident. I knew you loved to drive fast — and so did Larraine.

"And I knew that Larraine had been an actress, accustomed to altering her voice and her appearance, quite able to impersonate, over the phone at least, a man, a southern woman, and a girl like Selma Carle.

"But I just kept on overlooking the obvious until you piled too many impossibilities on top of one another. The coincidence of Selma's overhearing a vital conversation involving me and Rienzo — a chance in a million. Then the further coincidence of a telephone operator overhearing Selma talking to me — a chance in five million.

"Two long shots like that just don't come in together, baby. It's against logic and nature and experience and everything else. When I realized that, I finally began to use my head a little. Then, knowing a woman must have made that phony call to Nelson Hugo, I realized who the woman was.

"As soon as I had that, I could see in my mind, Selma, poor kid, coming brightly out to Tom Bates' house yesterday to get her handbag — and you, leaving, bumping into her. Then it didn't take any time at all to fit the rest of the pieces into the puzzle.

"Selma had told me that a couple of years ago she spent a whole summer with a girl friend who wanted to get tanned. From her description I should have realized the girl was a blonde.

"She also said she'd bumped into the girl friend lately, that she'd put on weight and gotten a boy friend. So she'd recognized you in spite of the dye job and the extra twenty pounds.

"And it was Selma's bad luck — and yours — that you had to meet again yesterday morning while I was sleeping."

He gestured, and the handcuffs rattled.

"That's it," he said. "If you have any doubts that we can prove it,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meg, just remember as soon as we take your prints and compare them with still existing prints of Larraine Grigsby, you're tagged. So do you want to take it now?"

"I'll take it, Max," she said. "It'll save so much time that way?"

She looked around the room, and both her voice and face hardened. "Yes, Polly Smith was my friend in Reno. She was a blonde too, and a little older, but we understood each other. I gave her some of my things and we used to get tight together and go driving. We were tight that night I went off the road. Polly was killed. I was thrown clear.

"I crawled back to the wreck. She was dead, her face pulped, her chest smashed, the scar on her breast obliterated.

"Then I saw my opportunity. I've always been able to make quick decisions and I made one then. I didn't want John to divorce me. I felt sure he'd be very rich some day. If he thought I was dead, it would automatically end the divorce proceedings. I could hide, and later on reappear, pretending to have had amnesia. I'd still be his wife and at the very worst he'd have to pay me off handsomely.

"I put my rings on Polly's finger, tucked my bag under her body, and slipped away. It was very late. I got back to Reno without being seen and woke Marshall Dunn and told him what had happened. He saw the possibilities of my plan and hid me. Later he helped identify Polly as me, and when Jonothan came out he was completely fooled. After all, there wasn't much left of Polly.

"As soon as he could, Marshall sent me here to live. I already was putting on weight, and twenty pounds changed me a lot. I dyed my hair and let it grow long, and cultivated a husky voice, the one I used to use playing gun molls on radio programs. Then I started to tan my skin.

"Selma was living next door then and I was lonely. She was a simple kid and she kept me company all summer while I tanned myself.

"Then Marsh got run out of Reno. He came here and opened up The Dunngeon. By then my hair was quite long, I was almost fat, and I didn't look anything like the blonde Mrs. Grigsby.

"So we started living together. Meantime Jonothan had remarried, but that didn't matter — the second marriage was illegal. As soon as he struck it rich I was going to take off weight, bleach my hair blonde again, and reappear as his loving wife. But then two things happened. Marsh got in dutch with that dirty little sadist there —"

Her tongue flicked like a snake's and her eyes blazed as she looked across at Rienzo. "— he got in dutch with Rienzo, and just then Jonothan came to California. Marshall needed money to pay Rienzo, and he suggested we try to get it from Jonothan. He worked out this promissory note scheme.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I didn't like it, but he insisted. So I wrote out the notes on some old letterhead paper, we put them under the sunlamp for twenty-four hours, then Marsh went to my husband.

"Then —" she shrugged. "Well, the big chance came up. The wheel stopped at a number we could really cash in on. I followed Marshall to his appointment with my husband —" She turned to Max. "That's a point you were wrong on, Max. We were both there together.

"I got there just as Marsh was getting out of his car. I told him the date was off, but he saw a light around the side and insisted on seeing if my husband was up.

"We stumbled over you, Max. Marshall lit his lighter and we recognized you. Then we peered through the shrubbery and saw my husband inside, impatiently tapping money into a bundle.

"Marsh said, 'Look, baby, this is your big chance. It would be even better to be a widow than a wife — the whole estate would come to you. We can do it in such a way that slob London will take the rap. Maybe it'll teach him to punch people around.'

"I couldn't talk him out of it. I didn't try very hard. It's true — I was sick and tired of the life I've been living. As for Marsh, he was so furious at you, Max, he was willing to take a chance he wouldn't ordinarily have dared take. He got your gun from my pocket and gave it to me and told me to do the job — that I could make John recognize me and kill him when he was off guard. Well —" she shrugged again — "I was playing for big stakes. I stepped in the window and spoke to him.

"I said, 'Hello, John. Remember me?' in my old voice. He stared at me. 'I'm Larrie,' I said. 'Aren't you glad to see me?'

"He just sat, staring at me as if seeing a ghost. I walked up to him and shot him and he never moved a muscle.

"It was Marsh who thought of rubbing his cane against your bloody head, Max. Then we left fast with the money. Marsh phoned the police from a drugstore to make sure they'd pick you up — that's another point you were wrong on.

"When we got to The Dunngeon, we found evidence there had been trouble. Marsh began to worry and drink. He was very drunk when you phoned me, Max, and we realized you were free. Then he really got worried. I knew that with you loose, you'd find a way to get to The Dunngeon to question Marsh and me, maybe very soon. So I encouraged Marsh to drink, figuring he'd pass out and nobody could get anything out of him for hours. Then I went outside to get some cigarettes I'd left in my car and I saw headlights coming up the drive. I thought it might be you, and I waited, then I saw it was a big limousine, the kind Rienzo's killers use.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I was frightened. I didn't go back inside, but ducked off behind the palm trees. Four men went in, and I heard them shouting at Marsh. I crept up to look in the window, and Marsh, just barely able to talk, was protesting because one of them had searched him and taken the ten thousand dollars.

"Marsh was insisting they take only the sixty-four hundred the IOU's were for. But they took the whole amount, and then, to teach him a lesson, they said, they hit him a few times with a chainjack.

"Marsh fell down and they left, with the money."

Deliberately she turned to Rienzo. "You filthy little creep!" she spat. "You sent those men. If it wasn't for you, nobody would have been killed."

Rienzo's swarthy face turned a darker color.

Larraine Grigsby took another deep breath. "Well," she said, "I looked down at Marsh, and I realized that with Jonothan dead, he was just a handicap to me. He'd hang around my neck the rest of my life. This was my chance to get rid of him and shift the blame to Rienzo.

"I dragged Marsh out to the kitchen, got his gun out of his safe, and shot him. But I didn't chainwhip him, Max, I didn't!" she added. "That's where you were wrong again!

"I hurried in and emptied the safe, took out the notes and destroyed them. Then I messed up the place, spilling lots of liquor over the blood-stains on the dining room floor. After that I packed and I was just going to leave when another car drove up — you, this time, Max.

"I tried to run away, but you caught me, so I made up a story that you accepted, and went with you to the Bates house because I knew you'd think it was funny if I refused, having said I was so scared and everything."

She sighed a little. "Max," she said, ignoring all the others, "what I'm saying sounds so — cold-blooded, doesn't it? But it wasn't done in cold blood, any of it. I was keyed up, fighting for my life —"

She searched his face, which expressed nothing.

"All right," she murmured. "I know it doesn't matter. Anyway, after that you have everything figured out right. I did start to leave early and I met Selma at the door. She recognized me and I knew if she ever got to talk to you, she'd talk about me and you'd tumble to the truth. I had to get her away from there fast. I gave her a fast story about the danger you were in and how we had to get away before someone saw us around the house, for your sake.

"She didn't suspect anything at any time. And in the end, there in her bungalow — well, I killed her. I had to. With her alive I could never feel safe. I could never return as Larraine Grigsby and not be worried for fear she would provide you, Max, with just the clue you needed to trip me up.

"I didn't want to — but I had to. So I did it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"As for why I didn't fly to Mexico City or someplace, now you know. I didn't have the money after all. Rienzo had it. I had to stick with the car, because that was my only cash resource. I was going to try to sell it, later. And it got me caught."

She was silent, sagging in her chair. Max spoke with something almost like sympathy in his voice.

"You did all right," he said. "For a murderer, that is. A sweet job of improvisation. It was really Rienzo who tripped you up, though, and because of him you could never have got away with it even if I had been gassed. I've wondered why he seemed so unsurprised by all this. Now I know. He knew his boys didn't kill Dunn. He figured you must have. Given that much, he very likely figured out the reason. So even if you had become the lawful Mrs. Grigsby again, he would soon have dropped in and wrapped his web around you, like the spider he is, and sucked you dry of everything you'd won."

"I — see." Larraine Grigsby nodded, and coughed, painfully. "So much — talking," she whispered. "My throat is dry. Could I — have a drink?"

She stood up and moved unsteadily to Fred Wharton's big desk. She caught herself against the corner of it as Wharton scrambled to his feet and reached for the water carafe.

She seemed to be pulling herself together with an effort. Then her hand slipped down, and she wrenched open the top lefthand drawer. From it she snatched the heavy automatic the acting D.A. kept there.

"Now, damn you all!" she screamed. "I'm going to settle a few scores! Especially with you, Rienzo, you creeping slug, you fat-bellied grave worm! And then you, Nola, you little harlot who kept pushing your breasts into my husband's face until he sent me to Reno."

As she screamed, she backed against the wall and lifted the .45 waveringly in both hands. Fred Wharton tumbled back. Nelson Hugo wrenched at his pocket as Wharton backed into him. Max London took two long strides and was beside her. He brought his handcuffed arms down over her head from behind and tried to wrest the gun from her. For an instant they struggled, then the gun exploded.

Across the room Tony Rienzo, who had jumped to his feet, was hurled back against the wall, his mouth opened in a soundless scream. For a moment as though pinned there he remained upright. Then he pitched forward to the floor. Behind him there was a fist-sized hole in the plaster wall, and the hole was rimmed with blood.

Later the coroner found that the .45 slug had hit his belt buckle going in and had flattened.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then, oblivious of the shouts and aimless scrambling of the rest, Max wrenched the gun from Larraine Grigsby's hands. She leaned back against the wall, and stared at him, her screaming hysteria of hate suddenly gone.

"Max —" she said. "Max — you —"

Then she fainted. Max let her fall. He took two quick strides and dropped the gun on Wharton's desk. Wharton and Nelson Hugo stared at him.

"She shot him," he told them, hard. "I tried to stop her and couldn't, because of the handcuffs. You saw it happen. You couldn't help it, she took us all by surprise, but after all, it was your gun, Wharton, and you, Hugo, you promised Rienzo nothing would happen to him, didn't you?"

Numbly the chief of police nodded. Behind Max the door had burst open and cops, led by Cal McVey, were pouring into the room. He paid no attention to them and held the two officials with his grating voice.

"You've only got one chance, Hugo, and I'm showing it to you," Max London said. "Rienzo's mob will take this as a personal double cross and rub you out and you know it. But here's how you can beat them to the punch and at the same time grab off a lot of credit and publicity.

"Keep Rienzo's lawyer on ice and see to it not a word of what's happened gets out of this building. Organize a flying raid on the Hi-Spot. Grab everybody there. It's Sunday morning, most of them are still asleep. Take the records, everything. Send other squads after his men who don't sleep there. You must know where to find them. Pick them up fast, slam them in the cooler, then play them off against each other.

"As soon as they know the boss is dead, some of them will break. You'll wind up smashing the city's new underworld organization and probably a grateful public will give you a medal. It's your only chance. Hit them fast and smash them and you'll both be public heroes. Wait even an hour and you, Nellie, will be perforated before the week is out."

They opened and closed their mouths.

"He's right, Fred," Nelson Hugo said in a choked voice. "We've got to do it. Clamp a lid on this room and I'll start giving the orders."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MAX LATHERED HIMSELF. Then he turned on the needle spray and let the hot water wash him off. He shut off the spray, reached for a Turkish towel, and walked into the living room toweling himself. Cal McVey was putting down the phone.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They're singing," he remarked. "Final count, thirty-two rounded up. A couple of the bigger ones, that we've got something on, are trying to draw lighter sentences. Won't be able to hold most of them, but they'll be out of town in twenty-four hours. Wharton and Hugo are busy being measured for halos. Wharton will probably get the D.A.'s job as soon as the old boy turns in his copy of Blackstone."

"Nellie Hugo will get so much praise he'll be a good boy after this," Max grinned. "There's nothing like a reputation for saintliness to keep a man on the narrow path."

He slid into a pair of French back shorts, dragged a magnesium overnight bag out of the closet, and began to pack. Cal McVey watched him, curiously.

"I can't help wondering how Larraine Grigsby knew about that gun the fool Wharton kept in his desk," he remarked presently, making a steeple of his knobby fingers.

"I guess I must have let it slip," Max answered, deadpan. "I had an idea of grabbing for it myself."

"You didn't have any idea, of course, she might go for it."

Max wrapped a bottle of aquavit in a sport shirt and tucked it into a bag. "Hard to get this stuff in small towns," he said. "Let's just say I wasn't surprised she went for it. It figured. Her temperament suggested that if she knew she was caught and going to get it, she'd try to take someone else along just for the satisfaction."

"Of course, a woman her size would have a tough time shooting a .45 without spraining her wrist," McVey drawled. He peered into the steeple he'd made with his fingers, as if studying something inside it. "Did you help her shoot Rienzo?"

"Certainly not," Max said. "I just made sure she didn't miss. I felt I owed her that much. Which reminds me."

He took his wallet from the dresser, slid out a check and endorsed it. "Jordan's," he said. "As soon as it clears I'll punch Jordan in the nose for that sock on the head. At least I wound up with one client. It makes me sore, though, to think of Rienzo getting away with Grigsby's ten thousand."

McVey unsteepled his fingers.

"You and Houdini," he said, in grudging admiration. "I'd have sworn you'd never get out of that one — that one way or another your goose was toasted. When did you first suspect Meg was guilty, and had to be Larraine Grigsby?"

"In Wharton's office last night. As soon as I realized two terrific coincidences like Selma's overhearing a conversation about the murder, and the operator's cutting in on her line at just the right moment, simply couldn't

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

happen. Actually, what Nat French told me about the fingerprints should have given me the case right away. But it went over my head."

"Dames," Cal McVey grunted. "You can't figure them."

"A psychiatrist could figure this one pretty good," Max told him, tying a brown Shantung silk tie and squinting at himself in the mirror. "She's a psychopathic personality, absolutely convinced anything she wants to do is right — including murder. Also she's a fine actress, a first class liar, and a remarkable opportunist. If you don't mind those little things she's probably pretty good company."

He closed his bag and locked it. "Stay as long as you like," he told McVey. "Just lock the door when you leave. You know where to find me if it's important."

He lifted the bag lightly and turned toward the door.

"Hey!" Cal McVey called suddenly. Max turned. "You left out pajamas," McVey told him. "I was watching."

Max lifted an eyebrow.

"You must be a detective," he said. "Figure out why. See you in a week."

He stroke out. After a moment the lanky Scotsman unfolded himself from the chair and went to the window. Six floors down he saw Max London drop his bag into the back of a convertible waiting at the curb, then slide in behind the wheel, beside a woman whose blondness was noteworthy even from six floors up.

The convertible pulled away, headed north toward San Francisco.

Cal McVey watched it until it disappeared. Then he grunted gently.

"Hell," he said, "I'd better call the old lady and tell her I'll be home early."

THE END

The next thrilling issue of MMB-M will feature "Live and Let Die" *by Ed Lacy. Young cop Dave Wintino has two tough cases to crack. One begins pleasantly with his keeping an eye on sexy Rose Henderson — the other is a hunt for a brutal cop-killer. Use the coupon below to subscribe.*

mail this money-saving coupon today

MERCURY MYSTERY BOOK-MAGAZINE M-M-9
527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Please enter my subscription at once, to start with the next issue.
I enclose ☐ $4 for 12 issues

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... Zone ..... State .....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MYSTERY PUZZLE: Miami Murder

INSPECTOR GOLDSMITH had arrived in Miami at noon; nine hours later he still wasn't used to being there. The hot sun all afternoon, the bright reds and pinks of blooming flowers, the tall palms — all seemed unbelievable after the long winter he'd come from.

Charlie Sanger's dead body, however, was more familiar. A nightclub proprietor shot in his plush office was not a new experience.

Goldsmith's old friend, homicide chief Reeder, came in from the outer office where the two girls were being held. "The bartender confirms it," Reeder said. "Daisy, the blonde, came in here about a minute after Rita. The office is soundproofed, so he didn't hear anything until five minutes later when the two of them ran out screaming."

"And each of them still claims the other shot him?"

"No change," Reeder said disgustedly. "Now how the hell am I going to prove anything?"

"Don't ask me," Goldsmith said. "Just get it solved tonight — we got an early date to go fishing."

Reeder stared dyspeptically around him, at Sanger lying on the floor, at the .38 near him, at the handful of twenty-dollar bills on the desk, at the open desk drawer.

"Yeah," he said. "If you want to go fishing, you'd better lend a hand. Let's go talk to the babes."

They were both dishes — Rita, the club's headline singer, with black hair and skin like dark honey; and Daisy, a bright blonde with creamy skin and large blue eyes.

Daisy talked first, jerkily, her face white. "When I came in, Charlie had just told Rita that he'd brought me down from New York to take over the top singing spot, and she was yelling at him terribly. Well, finally, Charlie opened the drawer and took out some bills. 'Take this and get lost,' he said. And she reached over and grabbed the gun out of the drawer and — and shot him . . ." She sobbed convulsively.

"That's all *lies!*" Rita screamed. "He told *you* to get lost. He may have been nice to you for the week he was in New York, but he said he told you not to come down here, that he had no spot for you. He was in love with me!"

"He begged me to come!" Daisy cried. "He was tired of you. Why, he told me so this afternoon when he took me fishing. We were out for hours in that little outboard boat catching boney fish, and he said I was the only girl he'd ever taken fishing."

"You mean bonefish," Goldsmith injected mildly.

"Her whole story is fish!" Rita said venomously. "Charlie never took any girl out on that fishing boat!"

The Inspector turned to Reeder. "One of them is lying," he said.

Which girl lied and what was the lie?
Solution on page 128.

— J. A. KRIPPER

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Almost everyone knows that Stanley Ketchel was one of the great boxing champions of all time, but many have forgotten that he was murdered — and under baffling circumstances. All the evidence pointed to a gambling syndicate yet the case was obscured by a missing diamond stickpin, a lucky bracelet, and a pretty cook. Here Erle Stanley Gardner relates how this strange case was solved by not *following the logical clues.*

THE CASE OF THE KNOCKOUT BULLET

by Erle Stanley Gardner

By a twist of irony, the famed sports celebrity destined for death at the hand of a murderer, that autumn morning long ago, had been known to millions as "The Michigan Assassin."

It was an appellation in no way related to the crime of murder, in its customary meaning. Sportswriters had created it as a tag for a brilliant young boxer as he fought his way in the prize ring to a world's championship title.

So, oddly, in this case it was to be the "assassin" who would be the victim. And it was a bullet instead of the fist of an opponent that delivered the knockout that ended forever the career of Stanley Ketchel, world's middleweight champion of his day.

This case always has intrigued me, for a number of reasons.

First, it is a murder yarn right down the alley of any writer of mystery stories. Second, in my youth I was greatly interested in boxing and for a time fancied myself a fighter of some promise. Ketchel's career was one that would appeal to any American youth.

Approximately my own age, Ketchel had proved himself an athlete of great personal integrity, with the exceptional skill and fighting heart that has characterized true champions. Virile and handsome, with a magnificently chiseled physique, he was not only the idol of the boys of the land but, wherever he went, he found himself the target of starry-eyed women who fancied him

1955 by Erle Stanley Gardner

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the answer to their romantic prayers.

But perhaps the most unusual element of all is the fact that today almost no one appears to be aware that murder wrote the final chapter in the record books of one of the greats in the history of boxing — murder that lashed out from far beyond the ropes and canvas of the ring.

It was a crisp fall morning — October 15, 1910 — in the Ozarks of Southern Missouri. Stanley Ketchel, middleweight champion of the world, rose early to take his accustomed road work along the by-ways of a cattle ranch to which he had quietly withdrawn a few weeks earlier. The ranch was owned by R. P. Dickerson, Ketchel's close personal friend and financial advisor. It was in Wright County, 42 miles from the city of Springfield.

Ketchel, upset and deeply annoyed by furtive but persistent overtures that had been made to him in New York by a Broadway gambling syndicate that he throw a fight, had gone to the ranch after publicly disclosing the efforts that had been made to draw him into the gambling conspiracy. He had been extremely bitter in denouncing the gamblers.

He left the ranch house shortly after 4 A.M., returning some two hours later after completing his exercise. The 20-odd hands on the place meantime had risen and gone about their duties.

Ketchel called through a window to the cook, requesting that a breakfast of ham, eggs and a glass of milk be served him on the porch. Then he went to his bedroom and thence on to the ranch wash-shed to bathe.

In the bedroom, it developed later, he put on a dresser a mysterious object that was to inject an almost occult touch into events about to occur.

Not far from the house, the foreman, Charles E. Bailey, and another employe, John Nolen, were piling logs in a woodshed. Shortly after 6:30 o'clock they heard a gunshot. Because the noise had seemed to come from in or near the house, Bailey and Nolen hurried to investigate.

The porch was unoccupied. Silverware lay on the floor. The tablecloth was in disarray. The glass of milk had been overturned. The ham and eggs were untouched. On the floor the two men discovered several small spots of blood. These formed a trail leading inside the house. In his room, sprawled face up across the bed, lay Ketchel. He was breathing but obviously dying.

As the two men bent over him, the champion gasped: ". . . got me!" Then he was gone.

Sheriff C. B. Shields was notified of the tragedy, as was also the fabulous Wilson Mizner, noted wit, story-teller and Ketchel's business manager, in New York. News of Ketchel's death stunned the sports

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world. Almost at once it appeared virtually certain the killing was an outgrowth, in some manner, of Ketchel's enraged denunciation of the Broadway gamblers.

Meantime Sheriff Shields, a methodical investigator and one of the outstanding law enforcement officers of his day in that part of the nation, took note of several odd circumstances at the ranch.

Ketchel customarily wore a holstered pistol while hiking in the woods around the ranch. The holster was on his belt, but his pistol was missing. Also mysteriously vanished was a .22 rifle Ketchel had received a few days earlier from his brother, Leon, in Michigan. Shields determined that Ketchel had cashed a substantial check — in the neighborhood of $1,000 — the day before. But there was no money in his pockets. Also gone was a diamond stickpin, valued at $800, which the champion always wore.

But the most fascinating discovery at this stage of the inquiry was a bracelet Ketchel wore habitually, both in the ring and elsewhere, as a luck charm. The sheriff found it on the bedroom dresser. It was fashioned out of tail-hair from a sacred elephant in India, mounted in gold. It had been given to the champion by a fan who had acquired it from a fakir in Calcutta.

According to its mystic legend the bracelet was supposed to have strange powers of protecting its wearer from bodily harm. Ketchel had prized the trinket immensely and always wore it. Apparently he had put the charm aside when he prepared for his morning bath. The bracelet and the legend about it aroused much curiosity.

A posse was assembled and a search was launched throughout the ranch and its surroundings. No one could be found who had seen anyone or anything untoward. Sheriff Shields questioned Daisy Johnson, the cook, but she was unable to shed any helpful light. She said Ketchel had appeared in excellent spirits when he called his breakfast order through the window. She had set out his food while he was bathing and then returned to her cook shack, a short distance from the central house. She said she had not heard the shot.

The wound which brought death, the sheriff determined, was caused by a small-caliber slug — apparently a .22 — that had pierced the champion's lungs, severing a major artery. It had been fired at close range from the back. From the angle of the wound and position of the table and chair, Shields deduced the killer had stood six to eight feet behind the fighter, at the entrance of the porch. The evidence supported the conclusion that the mortally wounded fighter had grappled with the killer after the shot was fired. The struggle then had moved on to the near-by bedroom.

In New York and throughout the nation, Mizner and top sports

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

editors of the country were developing scores of leads that focused attention on affairs of the gambling syndicate. From Chicago it was learned that the "fix mob" had taken a terrific financial beating on a fight in which one betting faction had assured another that Ketchel had been "reached." This was utterly preposterous, for it developed that the champion had, as a matter of fact, gone to considerable personal expense and effort to clean up the fight game, which at that time was shot through with double-crossings and shady dealings that threatened boxing's future.

Word was passed mysteriously that in retaliation for this a hired killer had been sent from St. Louis to "take care" of Ketchel before he had further opportunity to expose the racketeers.

In Missouri, Sheriff Shields had interviewed dozens of persons. Among these had been everyone even remotely associated with the ranch operation. All but one gave full and complete accountings of their movements at the time in question. The one exception was a farm hand who had disappeared on the day Ketchel was killed. The disappearance gave rise to no particular concern, however, since many of the help were transients and frequently went their way without troubling themselves with the formality of resigning.

Dickerson, who had felt keenly a sense of responsibility in the case through having invited Ketchel to move to the Ozarks, posted a $5,000 reward for apprehension of the killer of his friend. Posters were circulated throughout the nation. The amount — an almost unheard-of reward for the purpose at that time — reignited interest in the case across the country. A flood of fresh leads poured in, but none produced any evidence of value.

It was disclosed that Ketchel, although he had hinted strongly he was retiring permanently from the ring though only 23 years of age, was secretly, through Mizner, arranging a match — which would have been worth a fortune — with popular Billy Papke. This disclosure led to conjectures that certain forces were out to block the champion's career.

Then suddenly the ranch cook, Daisy Johnson, came forward with some information that put a new twist in the mystery. The attractive blonde revealed that the farm hand who had vanished had been her ardent admirer and had berated her for being even pleasant to the champion, whose romantic reputation made him jealous. This man was known on the ranch as Hurd, but Daisy Johnson said his true name was Walter Dipley, an ex-sailor and adventurer. Questioned further, she said that on his arm he bore a singular tattoo acquired in Hong Kong. It was a romantic design featuring the name of his sweetheart . . . "Daisy."

Shields swiftly had this informa-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion appended to the Dickerson posters. But as time went by the case remained as far from solution as it was when the ranch hands had found the dying champ. The elusive "gunman from St. Louis" evaporated. The mob from Broadway was grilled by experts, but nothing developed beyond the facts already known. The famous Wilson Mizner used all his ingenuity to dig up evidence.

It was to be a storm in the Ozarks that produced the key.

A man named Thomas Haggard, living alone in a modest cottage in the back country, was roused late one night by a knock at his door. A rain-drenched stranger, a rifle under his arm, stood on the porch appealing for shelter. Haggard took him in. The stranger was uncommunicative. As he sat before the fire, he removed his dripping shirt, exposing heavily tattooed arms. When Haggard showed his visitor to a bunk, he was puzzled and alarmed to note that the man slid the rifle under the blankets. Haggard waited until his visitor appeared to be asleep. Then he slipped out and raced to the cabin of his brother, a short distance through the woods. They discussed the peculiar actions of the wayfarer. Both brothers had seen the posters. They notified the sheriff.

A posse surrounded the cabin in the clearing. The arrest was without incident. The man with the rifle was sound asleep.

Sheriff Shields found a large amount of money on the suspect — much more than the man could account for. But of far greater significance was the discovery of a diamond stickpin in his purse. Then, through a check of serial numbers, it was established that the rifle he carried was the weapon Stanley Ketchel's brother sent from Michigan a few days before the champion died.

Walter Dipley admitted his identity and that he had harbored an overpowering rage at Ketchel, whom he believed a rival over the affections of Daisy. Evidence continued to mount to a point where there could be no question of what had happened — Dipley had ambushed the champion with his own gun, shot him, robbed him and fled.

The gambling conspiracy had played no part whatsoever in the murder, but had Sheriff Shields allowed himself to put all else aside in pursuing that "obvious" motive, the murder of Stanley Ketchel most likely never would have been solved.

Dipley was indicted and found guilty of first degree murder. He drew a sentence of life imprisonment in the Missouri State Penitentiary — for a knockout blow inspired by jealousy that ended the career of a world's champion.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Distinguished French biographer, historian and journalist André Maurois patriotically dabbles in foreign intrigue, where the censorship of letters about carp catches and rare tulip bulb shipments can have strange complications.

MEMO FROM The UNDERGROUND

by André Maurois

THIS HAPPENED BETWEEN THE TWO great wars. I was then a Reserve Officer in the French army and belonged to an infantry regiment. One morning I found in my mail a letter from the French War Office asking if I should be willing to attend a special period of instruction during the month of December. It would take place in Paris, at the Ecole Militaire. Attendance was not compulsory but the course, they said, would certainly interest me.

I called at the War Office to ask for additional information. The course was organised by the Deuxième Bureau of the General Staff, in other words by the Service des Renseignements, French counterpart of the British Intelligence Service. I said I felt quite incompetent. The answer was they wanted men of imagination and it seemed advisable to recruit a certain number of writers. I was tempted. Intelligence Services have a piquant flavour of mystery. Also they had mentioned a few names and I knew some of my friends would attend.

The colonel in charge of the course was a Colonel Cadieu, of the Deuxième Bureau. He was a quiet man, very much in the tradition of the sleepy detective who is really, behind his glasses, all alive, and a keen observer. He told us that we would function as a wartime service. There would be many branches where activities would be co-ordinated by him. He asked me if I might be interested in the censorship of letters.

Are there any letters to censor?

Of course, he said, for four months many of your friends (and he mentioned three novelists and two well-known dramatists) have been concocting all sorts of intrigues carried on by correspondence. Most of the letters are harmless and refer only to the private lives or the businesses of the writers. Others are related to the criminal activities of foreign agents.

All the mail will be brought to your service and read by the censors. It will be their business to detect anything suspicious and to

© *1955 by André Maurois*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inform higher authorities. You will have a right, if you are in doubt about someone, to order that inquiries be made by the Sureté Générale or by any branch of the service. Also a laboratory will be at your disposal with chemists specialised in invisible inks.

But that course, sir, will last only 15 days. Would not a real plot take more time to develop?

Not necessarily, the Colonel said. Moreover, we shall send you a new batch of mail every two hours so that one day will count as four.

Thus the following morning I found myself seated at a large table in an office at the Ecole Militaire with hundreds of letters in front of me. Several other officers were part of our service; our chief was a Major Dupré, by trade an engineer and highly intelligent.

I began to read all that stuff. It was amusing, much more so than a batch of real letters would have been. The novelists had written some excellent epistolary stories. Around the large table we exchanged impressions and eagerly awaited the next mail. Colonel Cadieu, who paid us a visit, found us too much amused and not enough on the alert for possible spies.

Be careful, he said, or something terrible will happen to you. Do not forget you are responsible for the safety of an army.

As a matter of fact I was looking all the time for signs of a secret language. Up to now I had found nothing but love, family or business letters. Suddenly in the third batch something struck me.

I had read some hours before a rather boring letter from a fisherman to a friend. He had caught a certain number of carps and so many gudgeons. He expatiated on the bait used and asked his friend for advice. I had now under my eyes a second letter (supposedly written two days after) in which again he enumerated his catches.

If there is one more, I thought, I shall ask for an inquiry.

In the fourth batch of the day the fisherman was at it again. I went straight to my chief.

I think I've got hold of something sir. Why should a man inform a friend every time he catches a fish?

Why shouldn't he? said Major Dupré.

Because it's a waste of time and of stamps. Moreover, look at the postmark. The letters come from Villeneuve St. Georges, which is an important railway junction. Is it not possible that the figures given indicate the number of trains which came through during the day, the name of the fish indicating the nature of the trains (goods, troops, cattle)?

I say, you are a reader of detective novels! Yet you are right; it is at least possible; let us ask for an inquiry. What do you want to know?

The number of trains that went through the station at Villeneuve Monday and Tuesday.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The following morning headquarters sent a reply. The numbers of the trains tallied exactly with those of the fisherman's catches. We sent in at once the name of the addressee.

Have this man arrested at once.

Very soon after we were congratulated by Colonel Cadieu. Our "vigilance and initiative," he told us, would have led to the arrest not only of one spy but of many members of a vast organisation.

You see, the Colonel said, that censorship is not a vain game. It deprives the enemy of his simplest means of communication. Now don't relax. There are still very dangerous men at large, and if you do not discover them you'll pay heavily for it.

My discovery had considerably improved my position in the staff. I needed it. Most of these officers had already belonged for a long time to the Service des Renseignements. I was a newcomer and an amateur. But after the "arrest" of the fisherman Major Dupré took me as his assistant. I felt naively pleased. One always prides himself at doing well a job which is not normally his job. My luck was not destined to last.

In the course of the second day on this course one of the censors brought to me a letter that came from Holland. A Dutch firm informed a French correspondent that they were sending him tulip bulbs. It was a new species, very rare, black with red spots. A colour plate was joined.

Yes? I said. You think there is something wrong with this?

I don't know. There might be . . . It came from abroad.

Well, you have the address of the correspondent. Have him investigated. Also ask the laboratory to have a look at the plate.

The answer came. Everything seemed in order. The laboratory had found the plate normal. The correspondent was a Frenchman who had for years specialised in bulbs.

Moreover, I said, the customs will open the parcel and see what there is in it.

One must not, said the Major, exaggerate the precautions of censorship. I know an American naval officer who got in great trouble, at the end of the war, because he was writing a book of mythology for his children. The censors could not believe that, when he told the stories of Orphée, Eurydice, Omphale or Médée, there was not a secret meaning hidden under the words. The poor man was in absolute good faith. Mythology had always been his hobby. But all the time he was shadowed and he felt nobody trusted him.

Perhaps it would be wiser, in wartime, I said, not to write about mythology, or if one does, to give marginal and irrefutable explanations for the benefit of the censor.

At this moment a strong explosion filled the office with smoke. The chairs on which the Com-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mander and I were seated seemed to rise in the air and then fell with us. No one was hurt but the office was in a deafening uproar.

What is this? An attempt on someone's life? An anarchist's mine?

Colonel Cadieu entered our room, a broad smile on his face.

I had told you something would happen to you if you were not always on the alert. That explosion was that of the tulip bulb you allowed to reach its consignee.

Why, sir? said Major Dupré. We asked for an inquiry.

You asked whether the man was a bona fide merchant. Yes, he had been for ten years but he was a spy all the same. Also you took it for granted that the parcel would go through the customs. It didn't. It was brought by underground ways. The whole story was told in another letter which you neglected. So I taught you a lesson.

Many years later, after the war, I met Major Dupré.

You remember, he said, the bulb and the explosion? The lesson was invaluable to me. At the beginning of this war, I was at the head of a censorship bureau and I came across a case exactly similar. But this time, thanks to Colonel Cadieu's joke, my investigation was more thorough and the importers of clock-bombs did not get away with it.

Experience keeps a dear school, I said.

Signed Benjamin Franklin, said the Major.

And Colonel Cadieu. I said.

PROOF NEGATIVE

In Evanston, Ill., the custodian of the detective bureau discovered a file he had never seen before. It contained a citation dated 1929, commending him for the efficient organization of the filing system.

In Stockholm, Sweden, prison officials tried to prove the curse of drink by staging a football match between the jail's chronic alcoholics and its other inmates. The drunkards won.

After a speech on "How to Train Your Memory" before the Los Angeles Optimist Club, the lecturer left the meeting hall, leaving his hat behind.

Investigating a murder, a police official in Toledo warned other officers to keep away from a perfect heel print until a plaster cast could be made. The following day he found out that the print was his own.

A Detroit woman, on her first solo drive, crashed into the automobile of the driving instructor, who, after giving her twelve lessons, had declared her a "perfect" driver. PAUL STEINER

Reprinted by permission of the New York Times

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With the dashing, real-life adventurer, Captain Wanderwell at the helm, the schooner Carma prepared to sail to Tahiti in search of treasure. He was aided by his junoesque blond wife and a wild crew of beautiful women and adventurous young men. Even before sailing there was tension in the air and then on the eve of departure, in the dimly lit cabin, a bullet ended the Captain's amazing career.

ONCE ABOARD THE LUGGER

by Stuart Palmer

CURTAIN RISES ON A LONELY, DESERTED dock on the Long Beach waterfront, where the schooner *Carma* has just been moored that afternoon. The date is December 6, 1932; the hour 9:30 of a dank and dripping evening.

That is the setting. Enter the chorus, consisting of eight very pretty girls and seven handsome men, most of them in their early twenties. They are all living aboard the schooner, supposedly engaged in preparing for an adventure cruise to Tahiti and Samoa. It is nice casting. One girl is a bewitching authoress and poet from Atlanta, one a bobbed-haired student from Boston and Wellesley . . . there's a cute, plump secretary from Manhattan, another poet, a painter, a dishwasher, a sailor or two, and an actress who had played Juliet in summer stock. And there is even a handsome young man with a heavy Oxford accent who claimed to be the son of a British peer — and was!

In the top starring role is Captain Walter Wanderwell, leader of the expedition. He is a tall, handsome, stiffly military chap who always wears boots and a self-designed uniform. He is a world-traveller, adventurer, and soldier of misfortune.

There is also, as heroine and leading woman, his wife Aloha Wanderwell. She is six feet and 140 pounds of blonde, curly-haired pulchritude.

We have also the Wanderwells' two children — Valerie, aged seven, and Nile who is pushing six, both members of the strange "crew." Little Val was the nominal owner of the vessel, since her father was not an American citizen and thus could not own a ship under United States registry.

And — to round out the cast — there is a slight, wavy-haired, good-looking young man in a gray crava-

© 1952 by Casebook Publications, Inc.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nette raincoat. He later stood trial for his life on the charge of having shot Captain Wanderwell through the back of the neck. Certain highlights of that memorable trial, presented here for the first time from my own records and with the amiable assistance of Judge Robert W. Kenny, who presided, are worth bringing up in this account.

Captain Wanderwell and his fifteen merry, madcap adventurers were all living aboard the *Carma*, although the rickety vessel had not been conditioned nor fully provisioned, and her sailing date for Tahiti and points south was, to say the least, highly indefinite. But they had no place else to live, since each had contributed all the loose cash he or she had toward the trip's expenses. Wanderwell himself had somehow raised the considerable amount of $22,000 with which to buy the ship, although his last venture — in the wilds of South America — had been spectacularly unsuccessful. He had purchased the old rumrunner at a government auction of seized ships, and had managed to have her towed to her present berth.

So, with all their money invested in the common kitty, the would-be Argonauts lived on canned beans and waited for the great day. Captain Wanderwell was a natural-born leader, imbuing them with confidence, a brave and dashing figure.

Only recently, within the last year, he had led a similar group of explorers north from Buenos Aires through some of the most impassable jungles of South America, travelling by means of two specially built, high-slung Ford trucks and stopping now and then to shoot movie film footage starring crocodiles, head-hunters, and of course the beautiful Aloha.

That particular expedition, as I have said, had wound up somewhat short of its announced goal of Beverly Hills, California, due to the fact that no motor cars had yet been built which could travel through those parts of South America where roads didn't exist. The trip had been a considerable disappointment and disillusionment to the members of the crew — the girls who had been promised roles in the picture found themselves fighting mosquitoes, doing chores, or carrying lights and cameras for the photography.

The group broke up completely at Colon, and there a number of lawsuits against the Wanderwells were immediately instituted by members of the party. But the Captain and his fair bride managed to sail for Los Angeles before the suits came to trial. So now — after a few months of much-needed rest — Wanderwell was ready to take off again. His new volunteer crew had been recruited through advertisements in newspapers and magazines and literary weeklies by offering any footloose adventurer the opportunity of having his or her invest-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment (which might range from $400 to $2,000 apiece) repaid tenfold from the profits of the new voyage — profits from the sale of the adventure movies they expected to make, from picture postcards, from curios and strange shells to be collected — and also possibly from the discovery of millions in buried treasure in case they happened to put in at the fabled Cocos Island or any other historic pirate hangout.

It may seem to contemporary skeptics that the investors were making a rather poor gamble. But it must be remembered that in that sad year of 1932 the nation was gripped tight in depression.

The fifteen who had signed on as the volunteer, amateur crew of the *Carma* did not know that the ship had already been condemned as unseaworthy; and that the aged vessel had taken two days to make the run of a few nautical miles from San Pedro to Long Beach, during which both of her auxiliaries had broken down completely. She was finally ignominiously towed to her new berth.

Here the Argonauts awaited her, ready to take off for anywhere. The cranky old *Carma* was possessed of only three cabins furnished with six double bunks and a few sofas. On the night when the fantastic comedy-tragedy really got under way, not all were aboard. The majority of the crew were out enjoying the dubious pleasures afforded by the Long Beach waterfront at the time — movies and speakeasies — and the fair Aloha had gone up to Los Angeles to visit her sister. The Captain was alone in his cabin aft; the remaining members of the crew were crowded in a cabin, amusing themselves after their wont, presumably listening to an accordion on which one of the boys had some facility.

But it was testified later that at least two of the crew saw a face appear at one open porthole, and heard a husky "Germanic" voice ask for Wanderwell. The visitor was directed to the other cabin — some said he was even guided there by one of the boys, but there is considerable conflict in the testimony about this point. Some of the gay young people in the cabin claimed not to have heard or seen anybody. Yet a while later there was the sound of a shot.

The little group investigated, and found Captain Walter Wanderwell kneeling against a sofa in his cabin in utter darkness. He was dying, having been shot through the back of the neck, the bullet ranging downward and through his heart. Rushing out on the deck, they saw no sign of anybody.

After some delay, the situation was reported by telephone to the Long Beach police, who proceeded to take charge after their fashion.

The boys from Long Beach headquarters had a fresh corpse on their hands, and immediately ruled out suicide since there was no gun around and since it was unlikely even to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them that a man could shoot himself in the back at a range of four feet or more. Then the officers remembered about the paraffin test and spent most of the night giving it to everyone aboard, with negative results. All got a clean bill of health, including Aloha Wanderwell herself who had been brought back from her sister's apartment on Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood (about twenty minutes away by auto, or half an hour by street car or bus).

By next morning the Los Angeles police were in on the case after *their* fashion — aided and abetted by Carlton Williams, brilliant police reporter for the Los Angeles *Times*. It was immediately clear to all parties concerned that some old enemy of the Captain had done him in. According to police records, there was only *one* old enemy — a former member of his group, who had been jettisoned midway on the auto-boat jaunt upward through South America, and who later had the temerity to come to Los Angeles and ask for his money back. This man's description was printed in the *Times* — Carl Williams' paper — and picked up by the other Los Angeles dailies, though for some reason his name was carefully withheld. And he was put on the police "Wanted" docket.

Meanwhile, down at Long Beach, there was much consternation and many alarums and excursions. The fifteen adventurers were coached, primed, questioned all night, and shown photographs of the wanted man. Some of them were placed under technical arrest for twenty-four hours. Even the two Wanderwell children were drawn into it.

At the same time a parallel investigation was being made through regular Los Angeles police channels. It was discovered that Captain Wanderwell had been in the custody of the Secret Service during the late war and had been interned for a while at the federal penitentiary at Atlanta as a German espionage agent. His real name was Valerian Johannes Riecynski, a Polish national; his military background and his captaincy were purely fictional.

The glamorous Wanderwell couple had also appeared on police records in Los Angeles in March 1925, charged with wearing United States Army uniforms without authorization. Actually, both Walter and Aloha (giving them the benefit of their assumed names) were only wearing their home-designed uniforms plus Army officers' Sam Browne belts as part of the act. It was, however, an offense for which both paid the not inconsiderable fine of $200. It was also revealed at that time, 1925, that Aloha — who claimed that Wanderwell had picked her up in a French convent (place unnamed) and swept her off her heels at the age of seventeen, was travelling around with him as his sister. She was immediately made a ward of the Los Angeles juvenile court, but charges were dropped when the dashing couple eloped and were

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

legally married. It is not a matter of record as to whether or not their two children were attendants.

It was a case somewhat complicated — for the investigating authorities of Long Beach and Los Angeles as well as for my associate Bill Moore, then police reporter of the Los Angeles *Herald-Express*, and for me as the visiting kibitzer who was supposed to supply "atmosphere" —

It was a time when few, if any, holds were barred. But the news leaked out that the entire investigation centered on one man, that man who had been a member of the earlier Wanderwell expedition. He and the Captain were supposed to have had a scene in the Wanderwells' Wilshire Boulevard apartment, during which the ex-Argonaut had demanded his money back. And — even though the disillusioned voyager had but one friend with him while Wanderwell was flanked with two aides — the Captain had shattered a window and yelled for help.

Aloha had then dropped in, and smoothed things out. Wanderwell had promised to pay the money later, thus stalling off his angry antagonist. However, he didn't make good his promise. So, the man who had challenged him, flanked by several others of the indignant South American contingent, finally went to the police bunco-squad, where they got no help at all.

The story that this man told was that he and his pretty young wife had joined the previous Wanderwell expedition in Buenos Aires; that they had contributed all their available funds and then had been stranded in Panama. He and his wife had been left strapped, then they had been forced to separate since she could get a subsistence job as an entertainer and B-girl in a Colon bar. So, he alone had worked his way north to Los Angeles to try to retrieve all or part of the original investment from the self-styled "Captain."

Early reports of the fracas in the Wilshire Boulevard apartment differed considerably. Aloha Wanderwell, who hadn't been present for much of the time, said that her husband had been threatened, and that his coat and tie were disheveled. All others present said that there had been no threats but only a demand for an accounting of funds, and that twice the instigator of the interview had suggested that they call the police.

At any rate, the day after the murder the investigation speedily narrowed itself down to this one target, this mysterious man who had been a member of the previous group — although police records showed that he was anxious to work if at all through proper legal channels. Photographs of the missing man were produced and suddenly several people conveniently remembered that they had seen someone of that general description lurking around the Pacific and Orient docks

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

— where the *Carma* was moored — at 6 P.M. the night of the murder. Others (or the same ones) testified that he had been noticed in the same vicinity at 11:30 P.M. that night, asking directions as to how to return to Los Angeles.

But on Thursday, December 8, Detective-Lieutenant Filkas of the Los Angeles Police, backed up by the intrepid Carl Williams, swooped down on a house at 2045 Blake Street, near Riverside Drive and the Los Angeles River. The dismal little cottage was dark, empty, almost unfurnished, without heat or light save that of a candle.

As the detective and the newspaper reporter descended upon the place, a man emerged from the house with his hands in the air. So enters our major suspect, one William James (Curley) Guy.

Curley Guy, as we came to know him, was the adventurer who had dared to approach Wanderwell and ask for his money back. He was a native of Wales, an authentic flyer, navigator and ship's officer; a slightly built man with clear-cut features, wavy hair, and a ready, apologetic smile. He said he had rented the abandoned house the morning after the murder, had stocked it with a few comestibles, and had then sat still and waited for the inevitable. When questioned by police and reporters he explained that he had gone into hiding because he knew he would be the primary suspect of the much-publicized murder, and didn't want to involve his friends, the DeLarms, with whom he had been living.

Besides, Curley Guy was in no position to face investigation. In his attempt to establish American citizenship he had been cutting numerous corners. A humble seaman-navigator aboard the palatial Vincent Astor yacht, he had jumped ship some months before when the vessel was docked near Los Angeles. Then, he had registered and voted at the recent elections in order to make himself eligible for a pilot's or a navigator's license — then only granted to American citizens.

A grayish raincoat was found among his meager effects and the police then marked the case Closed. There were various identification parades, held both at the *Times* offices and at police headquarters, some without Guy being present. But several important witnesses identified his raincoat — which they had seen through a twelve-inch porthole on the *Carma* on a dark and foggy night. Guy was given the nitrate-paraffin test and passed it, but the police explained that too much time had elapsed and that in the meantime he might have washed his hands.

The case, which had up until this time been largely centered in a newspaper office, finally came to preliminary hearing. Before a magistrate, the lovely Aloha Wanderwell, who had been very dry-eyed all this time, gave her testimony. She also

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smiled encouragingly at the prisoner all the while, which mightily confused the press. Also smiling and nodding to him was pretty Marian Smith, the girl from Atlanta who thought that she had seen somebody like him through the porthole.

What really flabbergasted the working press was that after the hearing Aloha walked across the room and made a point of warmly shaking hands with the prisoner and whispering a few words to him. It was certainly evident at the time that there were no hard feelings, anywhere. It made no sense to the boys on the *Times* — nor to us on the *Herald-Express*, the opposition paper.

The trial of William James (Curley) Guy opened February 3, 1933 in Long Beach, with Judge Robert W. Kenny (more recently Attorney General of the State of California and now a prominent attorney specializing in labor law and relations) presiding. At the request of the city editor of the *Herald-Express*, I was assigned to cover the highlights of the trial. This may have been because of, or in spite of, the fact that my early stories on the case had accented my belief that Curley Guy was innocent.

Weeks ahead of the trial our opposition paper, the *Times*, intimated that Curley Guy was guilty. The *Herald-Express* inclined toward the opposite viewpoint — not only because of my own hunch but because Bill Moore, their regular police-reporter, agreed that the case against Guy was as full of holes as a Swiss cheese. The thing became a battle between two great rival newspapers.

Judge Kenny, looking like an Alaskan billikin or an Oriental Buddha, dominated the proceedings. The Judge ruled with cautious fairness — though some of the newspapermen who lunched with him gathered that in his private opinion he felt rather sure that the trial was a dry run; there would be no victory for the State.

Representing the defence was Eugene McGann, a fine old Irish warhorse in the tradition of Fallon and Jerry Geisler, who operated from the beginning as if he knew that he had the world by the tail with a downhill drag.

Buron Fitts, a prominent legal light at the time, was then District Attorney of Los Angeles, and his jurisdiction covered the scene of the crime. But at the last minute he decided to send in his third team, a couple of bright young men fresh out of law school. Bill Brayton and Clarence Hunt carried the case for the People, doing their level best with what they had — which wasn't too much.

The two were bright young men and they had a true bill presented by a picked grand jury. But I always felt that they realized that the facts of the killing were still obscured. They did their best, but they had to sit in on a tough poker game with nothing better than two pairs.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And Curley Guy had an ace in the hole, as I wrote then and still maintain.

On the opening day of the trial at Long Beach I was allowed an interview with the prisoner in his cell, and later was permitted to walk with him and his aged, tobacco-chewing deputy sheriff several blocks through the busy streets of Long Beach to the courtroom.

As we walked slowly along the streets, I tried to make the most of the time — tried to probe a little into the mind of the man accused of murder. But he had little to say. He disposed of Wanderwell in a few well-chosen if unprintable phrases. The man had been only a twenty-one-carat phony, who had made his living out of taking bows for adventures he had never had — and out of taking money from little people who were seduced by his talk. The bullet through the back of his neck had been too good for him, but Curley laughed at the suggestion that he himself had put it there.

My impression of Guy at the time was that he was a right little, tight little Welshman, who knew planes and the navigation of ships, who would — for all his slight stature and boyish profile — have been a bad man to push around. But I also felt that he would, under any pressure, be the sort of person who would only hit *above* the belt. He despised Captain Walter Wanderwell — but I could not believe that he would have shot him in the back.

I tried to turn the conversation toward the topic of the lovely lost Vera, the wife from whom he had separated in the Canal Zone some months ago, and whose loss was supposed to have inspired his murder of Wanderwell. Guy shrugged that off. They were stranded in the Canal Zone. Vera had a chance to become an entertainer in a café, a B-girl, maybe worse. So, she chose to remain there and eat regularly, while he worked his way north.

"Water over the bridge — or do Americans say 'dam'?" queried Guy. More important to him was the question of whether or not, after the trial, he would be deported. He was determined to secure American citizenship.

I tried to explain to him that his situation was precarious, since he had been born in Wales and later had become a citizen of Australia. The only way he could legally enter the U. S. A. was on a quota, and this particular police record would not help him with any of the immigration authorities.

About the trial and the Wanderwell murder itself, he would say very little. But I did discover the fact that Guy did not know that on the day of the murder the yacht *Carma* had been moved to new moorings at the P. and O. docks. Which response could, of course, have been faked. It sounded very likely as presented to the jury by Mr. Brayton and Mr. Hunt. Things looked not too good for Curley Guy during

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the first days of the trial, but he remained confident and unruffled.

Prominent in the courtroom during the trial was Aloha Wanderwell — and her sister, Margaret B. Hall — each done up in picturesque uniforms consisting of open silk shirts with loose Russian sleeves, dark, tight vests, breeches and shiny boots. The sister had never been on any of the expeditions, but she certainly went along with a gag. They were a striking couple. Aloha had her fair hair done up in tight ringlets under a tam-o-shanter cap and added considerably to the tone of the affair. Everyone waited hopefully for the day when she would be called to testify, but the trial dragged on and on with medical evidence that "proved" that Wanderwell had been shot at close range — that he had been shot from outside the porthole — that the bullet had ranged here, there and everywhere . . .!

Still the trial dragged on, with days spent on the testimony of Guy's friend Eddie DeLarm (owner of a plane which had been making mysterious trips to Mexico), of Eddie's wife and of his two teen-age daughters — all of whom swore that Guy was in his room in their Glendale house at the time of the crime. The jury had a field day, making trips to look at the schooner *Carma* (where one juror shocked the court and panicked the newspapermen by making Rabelaisian suggestions concerning the way in which fifteen crew members and four Wanderwells must have utilized the limited sleeping arrangements of the ship) and to the original slip where the *Carma* had been tied, and even to the shack where Curley Guy had gone into hiding the morning after the murder.

DeLarm, not the most co-operative of witnesses, testified that most of his original statements to the police had been obtained under duress. He cited a night when he and his wife had had their home invaded by Lieutenant Filkas and reporter Williams — without warrant —during which time they had taken it for granted that Williams was an officer and not just a *Times* reporter. Some of the witnesses who had testified to seeing Curley Guy's face in the porthole just before the murder — after having been prompted by glimpses of his photograph or looks at his raincoat — hedged on their testimony. It was also brought out that DeLarm's car, the only vehicle to which Guy had ready access, had stood in DeLarm's driveway all the time during the evening of the murder.

Although the case for the prosecution began to go all to pieces, it had a momentary lift when a trimotored plane registered in the name of DeLarm was nabbed at Corona Airport, near San Diego, and found to hold 500 gallons of alcohol illegally imported from below the border. DeLarm insisted that he had sold the plane to somebody else a few days ago, but he was undoubtedly making

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a living running a shoe-string air transport and Curley Guy — a pilot and navigator — worked for him and lived with him. Perhaps we here have an indication of the secret which Guy was anxious to hide. The serious student of the case should certainly keep that fact in mind. All this happened in the days of prohibition, when an enterprising man with an airplane could make $4,- or $5,000 by importing a load of schnapps from south of the border. There were also numerous Chinese who waited in Mexican cities, ready to pay almost anything for an entrée into the U. S. A. Not to speak of the traffic in drugs which went on and still goes on between Tijuana and points north. At any rate, DeLarm and his friend and associate, Curley Guy, had been making twice-weekly flights across the border for some months. The record does not show that they delivered any cargoes of Mexican serapes or huaraches.

Like most newspapermen assigned to the trial, I got awfully bored with it finally, and went around the corner to a nearby Long Beach burlesque theater which offered as its main attraction a double bill consisting of the personal appearance of the luscious Aloha Wanderwell together with the first showing of the film made in South America, *The River of Death*. The show was a sell-out, with standing room only. I must admit that Aloha was a considerable disappointment, since she only appeared briefly and in a tight military uniform not designed to do justice to her junoesque charms. Aloha recited in flat midwestern accents a short introduction to the film, then gave its narration. The picture itself was definitely in the home-movie category. There were interminable scenes of Aloha hemmed in by head-hunters and head-shrinkers who mugged happily for the camera; there were scenes of her knocking off crocodiles and jungle cats with her rifle and pistol. But the picture dragged. Before the second reel had run off some of the cash customers in the back rows were shouting "Take it off, take it off . . ." in the old burlesque tradition, and making wolf-whistles at the lady on stage.

Two blocks away from the burlesque theater the trial still dragged on and on, becoming less and less newsworthy. And then, in the middle of a dull afternoon, with almost no reporters at hand, the prosecution suddenly called Aloha Wanderwell to the stand. She was, of course, the most interesting, exciting, glamorous figure in the entire case — she was front-page stuff. But everybody thought she would be held in reserve for another day or so, and her appearance in the witness chair at that time was a surprise.

Her testimony, delivered in a faint, cautious voice, was nothing unexpected. She told of the scene in the Wilshire Boulevard apartment house when Curley Guy and his friend and employer DeLarm had come visiting Wanderwell, who

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had been flanked by two associates but still had felt it necessary to smash a window and holler for help.

From her own separate apartment next door she had heard the appeal and come running, whereupon she smoothed things over between the five men and got Guy and DeLarm to leave after her harried husband had promised to square the financial thing at a restaurant that night. It is not recorded that he ever kept the date.

The witness was perhaps a little disappointing to the two bright young assistant district attorneys, for her testimony — while it matched what she had said at the preliminary hearing and before the grand jury — was not too strong against the prisoner at the bar. But all the same, that was a tense half hour in the courtroom — an hour which I am sorry to have missed.

His honor, Judge Kenny, had been a newspaper reporter before he took up the study of law and rose to his present eminence. Realizing that Aloha's testimony was the high spot of the trial, and also realizing that her appearance would give a big break to the morning newspapers and leave the afternoon sheets out in the cold, he reverted to type. Once a newspaperman, always a newspaperman. His Honor quietly recessed the session for ten minutes on the grounds that he had to make a long distance telephone call.

This fact has never previously been made public, but with Bob Kenny's permission I can now let out the secret that his call was to the offices of the *Herald-Express* (the Los Angeles newspaper on which he had once years ago been a cub-reporter) and that he gave the city editor of his old paper enough of the story on Aloha's testimony so that instead of being scooped, we had an exclusive front-page story.

Not, of course, to intimate that Judge Kenny wasn't impeccably fair in his handling of the Wanderwell murder trial. Most of his rulings, as the transcript shows, were in favor of the People. Messrs. Brayton and Hunt had a certain amount of evidence, mainly circumstantial, on their side.

The case finally went to the jury at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Before 6 the twelve were back — with the expected verdict of Not Guilty. It was a verdict which surprised nobody and one which I think was concurred with by His Honor and by the press and public.

Which brings us inevitably to the gaps in the story; faces us with the certain question of who actually did put a .38 bullet through Captain Walter Wanderwell's back? Your guess may be as good as mine. I am not able to answer that question, any more than can the police even at this late date.

There were some interesting questions which I raised at the time, and still raise.

Was it likely that Curley Guy, a two-fisted forthright aviator and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

navigator, even with a grievance against Captain Wanderwell, would have shot the man in the back over a matter of a few hundred dollars? To me, from a psychological standpoint, it seems out of character. Guy had already faced Wanderwell and had scared the much-bigger and heavier heroic adventurer into spasms — and into smashing a window and calling for help.

Then too, what were the reassuring words that the fair Aloha whispered to Curley Guy at the preliminary hearing, and why did she and certain other members of the group smile and nod at him in such a fraternal manner?

Then, too, Wanderwell was found to have been killed by a bullet from a .38 pistol. No evidence was ever brought forward to show that Curley Guy ever owned or possessed such a weapon. But the evidence does show that Wanderwell had — in addition to a heavy stock of rifles and carbines — a .38 pistol. It disappeared about the time of the murder.

And why was he found dying in the dark? The murderer, knowing that people were in the next cabin, waited on the scene for an extra second to turn out the light. Why?

At the time the jury and the press made an inspection of the *Carma*, we discovered that in the cabin where Wanderwell died, concealed by a rug, there was a hatch leading down into the hold and the bilges, easily raised from above or below. From the hold there were half a dozen other hatches opening into the cabins, the mess-hall, and out on deck. It is within the bounds of possibility that someone who hated Wanderwell and who knew the ins and outs of the schooner could have crept through the hold, raised the hatch, and shot the man, then escaped the way he came.

One cannot sensibly accept the theory that Wanderwell was killed by a visitor who showed his face at the porthole to at least four people. Wanderwell was a nervous jittery character. He would never have turned his back on Curley Guy or any of his enemies. Yet he had obviously turned his back and had been leaning over-backwards at the moment he was shot — the bullet entered his neck and ranged down to the heart. Was he, perhaps — at the request of someone he knew and trusted — engaged in reaching up toward his collection of scrap-books on a shelf when the shot was fired?

Various other interesting theories have been put forward. It has been seriously suggested that Wanderwell, realizing that he had sunk $22,000 in a useless hulk of a vessel and that he was at the end of his rope, had taken his own life with his .38 pistol but changing the suicide into the semblance of murder by previously tying the gun to a weight and dangling the weight out of the porthole, so that when in death he released his grip the gun would disappear forever into the muddy bot-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tom of the harbor. This ingenious theory still does not explain why he should have shot himself in the back at such an angle, but one cannot say it was absolutely impossible.

It has also been seriously suggested that one of the Wanderwell children, inspired by seeing movies of some two-gun shooting hero of the time, had come upon their father's loaded pistol and had pulled the trigger. But in the light of the extensive grilling given the Wanderwell children it seems unlikely that they could have kept quiet.

In my own opinion the true solution would have come from a study of the situation on board *Carma*. With no less than eight attractive young women aboard, with Captain Wanderwell a handsome, dashing figure, there could have been conflicts and frictions, romances and jealousies and broken hearts and revenges unguessed at by the thumb-fingered authorities. The Wanderwells were not close at the time — Aloha had months before made her own apartment next door to her husband's in the place on Wilshire. And she had had no compunctions about leaving him on the ship, with all the pretty crew members, while she went up to Los Angeles to stay with her sister. Was it not within the realm of possibility that Wanderwell had tired of the pretty blonde wife and was carrying on with one or more of his charming feminine Argonauts? Could not that have led to disastrous results?

It is of course within the bounds of possibility that Curley Guy, or some other vengeful former voyager, did come down to the P. and O. docks that night, did appear at the *Carma's* porthole, and ask for Wanderwell. If so, that person may not have come armed, and may not have fired the shot. It seems, from this perspective, unlikely that a would-be killer would show himself so openly, even through a porthole — or that he would be seen some hours after the murder wandering around the waterfront area.

These questions will never be answered now. The Los Angeles police force — and particularly its homicide squad — have in recent years been completely rebuilt. Many of the old-timers still remain in uniform, however, and at least two of them have admitted to me, off the record, that they have finally come to the conclusion that Wanderwell wasn't killed by Curley Guy at all, but by —

Guy himself, when released, put up a stout fight to resist being transported back to Australia — the boy wanted most desperately a chance to become an American citizen. The odds were against him, though he even paid a call on Judge Kenny, and asked the jurist's help. Kenny was friendly but dubious.

The young man kept in touch with the judge through letters and postcards, even after he was deported. He popped up a few years later, as a fighter pilot for Haile

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Selassie in Abyssinia. He reported in again at the beginning of World War Two — he had a job ferrying Hudson bombers from the U. S. A. to Britain. On his fifth trip he got into trouble off Newfoundland, and had only time to radio back "Ditching, tanks all empty, cheerio" before he went down into the cold bitter waves of the North Atlantic — not a bad end for a true soldier of fortune.

But most of the questions are still unanswered. Carlton Williams, now a veteran newspaperman on the staff of the *Times*, remembers the Wanderwell case perfectly. He has just now stated to me that in his opinion there was never any doubt about the murder at all; Curly Guy pulled the trigger and Wanderwell probably had it coming to him. It may be so.

But it is also important to remember that a man may be an enemy of society in a small way and not in a big way. A man may have something to hide — when confronted with the police and the press — and yet not be guilty of the major crime of which he is accused. Curley Guy had been cutting corners all over the lot since he jumped ship — there were half a dozen possible charges against him. He had a lot to cover up, if not a murder.

Anyway, Curley Guy is dead. When his plane crashed into the sea, the story of the murder on board the schooner *Carma* was ended.

For some time after the trial the fair Aloha haunted the Hollywood casting offices, then, after a few weeks she disappeared — perhaps she retired to that incredible French convent where only English is spoken.

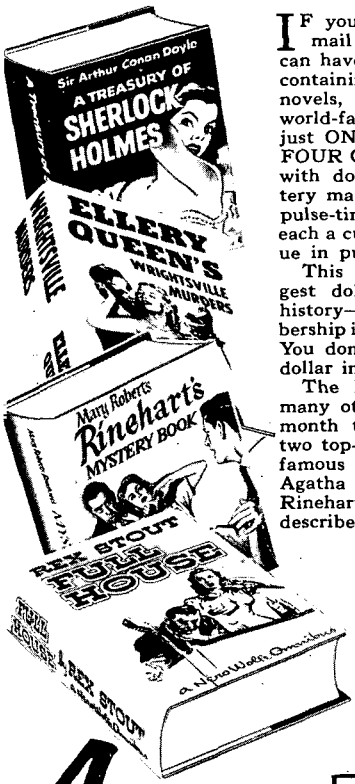
As for the schooner *Carma*, a few weeks after the end of the Wanderwell trial she was officially condemned and was towed out to sea and sunk. Her secrets are now and for all time secure in Davy Jones's locker.

Solution to Mystery Puzzle on page 105

Daisy lied when she said she'd been out in a small boat for hours — if she had been, her skin would not have been creamy, her face white. It turned out that she'd asked to go fishing, and Sanger had turned her down, told her Rita was his girl and New York had just been passing the time. She'd gone to his office to change his mind; when he jeered at her in front of Rita, she killed him in a blind rage.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just Imagine Getting ALL of These New Books by Top Mystery Writers For Just $1.00



IF you will simply tear out and mail the Postcard below, you can have a huge mystery "library" containing *forty-three complete* novels, novelettes and stories by world-famous authors — ALL for just ONE DOLLAR! Included are FOUR GIANT VOLUMES packed with dozens of breathtaking mystery masterpieces . . . PLUS three pulse-tingling new mystery novels, each a current best-seller! Total value in publishers' editions: $22.40!

This package of books—the biggest dollar's worth in publishing history—is yours *at once* with membership in the Dollar Mystery Guild. You don't even have to send your dollar in advance!

The Mystery Guild offers you many other advantages, too: Each month the editorial board selects two top-notch new books—often by famous authors like Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, Mary Roberts Rinehart and Rex Stout. These are described to members well IN ADVANCE. If you would like to receive the book, you let it come, post paid. If you don't want a book, simply tell the Club. It will not be sent.

These brand new mysteries sell for $2.50 to $3.50 in publishers' editions. But members pay only ONE DOLLAR each (plus small shipping charge) for their hard-bound, large sized volumes! (You pay only *after* you examine your selections.) Occasionally you will also have the opportunity to take an extra-value, optional selection at $1.49. But you buy only the books you want—as few as four selections a year if you wish—and build a fine library almost for pennies.

No wonder so many people consider DOLLAR MYSTERY GUILD membership the greatest value in the world of books! And, if you send the coupon now you get these SEVEN new books — *forty-three great mysteries* — for ONE DOLLAR as a membership bonus! Mail the post card today.

4 GIANT VOLUMES WORTH $13.90 in Publishers' Editions

plus **3 NEW NOVELS** WORTH $8.50 in Publishers' Editions

TOTAL VALUE $22.40

all **7 books $1.00**

with membership

MAIL THIS POST CARD AT ONCE!

Please enroll me in the Dollar Mystery Guild and rush me ALL these new books worth $22.40 in publishers' editions. Later, I'll send only $1 (plus shipping) for the entire 7 book membership enrollment package.

MEMBERSHIP BONUS—4 GIANT VOLUMES
PLUS 3 FULL-SIZED NOVELS—ALL FOR $1
A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes • Wrightsville Murders
Full House • The Basle Express
Mary Roberts Rinehart's Mystery Book
Hickory Dickory Death • Suddenly a Widow

New book bargains will be described to me each month in the Guild's advance bulletin "Mystery Guild Clues." Whenever I don't want a book I will notify you, and it won't be sent. I pay nothing except $1 for each selection I accept, plus a few cents for shipping (unless I choose an extra-value selection). I need take only four selections. **NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I can return books in 7 days and membership will be cancelled.**

NAME_____
(please print)

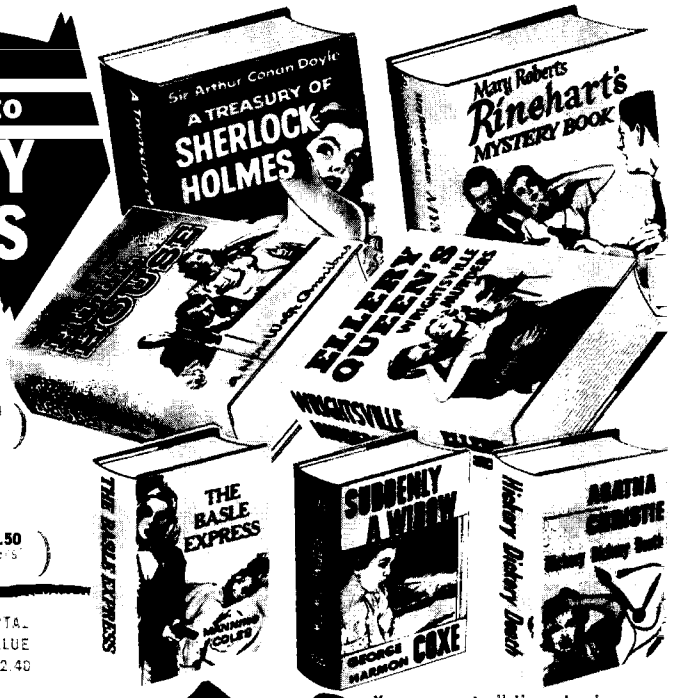
ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ ZONE____ STATE_____

(Same offer in Canada, address Dollar Mystery Guild, 105 Bond St., Toronto 2, Ont. Good only in continental U.S.A. and Canada.)

PRINTED IN U.S.A.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A New Kind of Bargain Offer to MYSTERY READERS



take **4** GIANT VOLUMES (WORTH $13.90 in Publishers' Editions)

plus **3** NEW NOVELS (WORTH $8.50 in Publishers' Editions)

TOTAL VALUE $22.40

all **7** for only **$1.00**

When you join the Guild and agree to accept 4 new mysteries a year.

Yes, you get all these books —for only ONE DOLLAR!

A TREASURY OF SHERLOCK HOLMES by *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.* 630 pages contain TWO complete novels — the strange, unnerving *Hound of the Baskervilles* and *A Study in Scarlet*—PLUS 2 short story masterpieces about the world's most famous detective. Pub. ed. $2.95.

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART'S MYSTERY BOOK. Three top murder classics in one huge book: the eerie *Circular Staircase*, the nerve-jangling *Man in Lower Ten*, and the famous unguessable *Case of Jennie Brice.* Pub. ed. $3.50

SUDDENLY A WIDOW by *George Harmon Coxe.* The note outside her husband's bedroom said: *"When you open the door . . . I WILL BE DEAD."* But the police say he was killed! And the note accuses his wife of every misbehavior . . . including MURDER! Pub. ed. $2.75.

FELL HOUSE by *Rex Stout.* Five terrific Nero Wolfe puzzlers! *The League of Frightened Men, And Be A Villain, The Gun with Wings, Bullet For One* and *Disguise for Murder!* Pub. ed. $3.50.

WRIGHTSVILLE MURDERS by *Ellery Queen.* Elderly Diederich Van Horn took Sally from the slums, into his wealthy home. He married her . . . his adopted son fell in love with her . . . and then MURDER stepped in! This exciting novel *Ten Days' Wonder* . . . is just one of *three* full length masterpieces (including *Calamity Town* and *The Murderer is a Fox*) ALL in this volume! 576 pages. Pub. ed. $3.95.

THE BASLE EXPRESS by *Manning Coles.* A fanatic killer murders the WRONG man! The RIGHT man will certainly be next. Excitedly, you turn on the "wrong" man's tape recorder and discover that the person *really* marked for death is . . . yourself! Pub. ed. $2.75

HICKORY DICKORY DEATH by *Agatha Christie.* A crime wave at a fashionable school. A pretty co-ed confesses her guilt to Hercule Poirot. And she's promptly *MURDERED in her bed!* Pub. ed. $3.00

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

First Class Permit No. 3, Garden City, N. Y.

THE DOLLAR MYSTERY GUILD

DEPT. MMM-8

GARDEN CITY

NEW YORK

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED